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Metaphor in Chinese Social Media: Representations of China-Russia Relations

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Abstract. The paper investigates metaphor use in Chinese social media. The importance of the research stems from the growing influence of Chinese social media on people's participation in the discussion of the future of China-Russia relations in the political arena and the metaphor theory providing an impetus for research in various fields. The major objective is to analyze metaphors with the target domain "China-Russia relations". The authors draw primarily on theories developed in metaphor studies. The source of the material is 悟空回答 (Wukong Huida). The material comprises 250 metaphors studied through a method of metaphorical modelling. The focus is on five dominant source domains: Organism, Inanimate nature, Animal, Game, and War. The findings show that metaphors, presenting the future of China-Russia relations, have neutral, positive or negative connotations. Positively coloured metaphors in source domains Organism, Inanimate nature, Animal, and War prevail in describing the future of China-Russia relationship in the situation of American sanctions and their strategic partnership. Neutral metaphors are fixed in the source domain Organism. Negative metaphors from Animal and Inanimate nature source domains depict probable territory conflicts between China and Russia. Game metaphors produce images of a favorable future for China and a pessimistic one for Russia.

Keywords: social media, metaphor, image of the future, China-Russia relations, Chinese discourse.

Research area: theoretical, applied, comparative and contrastive linguistics.

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Метафорическое моделирование российско-китайских отношений (на материале социальных сетей Китая)

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Аннотация. Актуальность исследования связана с высокой динамикой российско-китайских отношений и растущим влиянием социальных сетей в обсуждении политических проблем рядовыми гражданами. Цель работы состоит в выявлении особенностей метафорического моделирования образа будущего российско-китайских отношений в китайских социальных сетях. Источником материала выступил веб-сервис вопросов и ответов 悟空回答 (Wukong Huida). Материал представлен 250 метафорическими единицами, извлеченными с помощью процедуры сплошной выборки. Хронологические рамки исследования включают период с 2014 года по настоящее время. Выбранный хронологический срез совпадает с периодом санкционной политики, проводимой странами Запада против России. С помощью метода метафорического моделирования метафоры классифицированы по сферам-источникам. Приемы количественной обработки данных позволили ранжировать метафорические модели по шкале частотности, создать систему метафорических моделей, выявить доминантные модели организма, неживой природы, мира животных, игры, войны. Основные прогностические смыслы, транслируемые метафорами доминантных моделей, сводятся к следующим. Позитивно окрашенные метафоры моделируют улучшение российско-китайских отношений в будущем. Нейтральные образы репрезентируют будущее двусторонних отношений как вынужденное сотрудничество России и Китая и возможность совместно противостоять странам Запада. Метафоры с негативным оценочным потенциалом продуцируют образы вероятных территориальных конфликтов между двумя государствами. Полученные результаты способствуют более глубокому пониманию позиции китайского общества по отношению к России и к перспективам российско-китайского сотрудничества.

Ключевые слова: социальная сеть, метафора, образ будущего, российско-китайские отношения, китайский дискурс.

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Introduction

Metaphor has been a very important tool for persuading the public in political speech since ancient times. It is still considered one of the most convincing linguistic techniques in politics that can help politicians to acquire, maintain and sustain power. Modern linguistics considers a conceptual metaphor as a means to influence people's perception of the world and form their value system, with central emphasis on its cognitive and persuading potential in political discourse. In this type of discourse conceptual metaphors are thought to be tools for exercising social power and manipulating the audience's consciousness and behavior.

In social media metaphors help users to create their "virtual" image and express feelings, states and motives of their behavior. Furthermore, they serve to convey the meaning more accurately, focusing on important details of the message and working for the purpose of manipulating opinions and judgements by persuasion.

The article focuses on the analysis of metaphors that model the future of China-Russia relations in the situation of sanctions programs, imposed by the USA, in Chinese social media.

Literature review

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) interpret metaphor as the most important cognitive operation on concepts, a way of structuring a conceptual system. The scholars believe that metaphor permeates our lives and manifests itself in language, thought and action. Traditionally, it has been argued that the conceptual metaphor theory provides a fundamental insight into the human mind, which highlights the omnipresence of metaphor in language in general (Feldman, 2006; Gibbs, 1994; Grady, 1997; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980); and in political discourse in particular (Jing-Schmidt & Peng, 2017). Previous studies have reported that metaphor is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a cognitive process. By structuring our thoughts, metaphor helps us to understand incomprehensible facts by using familiar concepts of basic experience.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that conceptual metaphor shows common mappings through conceptual domains including two

types: a source domain and a target domain. The first domain denotes the sphere that contains metaphorical expressions, the second one refers to the concept to be understood.

Black (1962) claims that metaphor plays the role of a "cognitive tool" and serves as a channel for examining and observing the world. Chudinov (2012) points out that metaphor is considered a mental operation, a way of cognition, categorization, conceptualization, evaluation, and explanation of the world. The scholar states that a person not only expresses his thoughts with the help of metaphors, but also thinks with metaphors, learns about the world he lives in with their help, and in the process of communicative activity strives to transform the image of the world existing in the mind of the audience. Li (2017) argues that it is the metaphor that can form a different, fundamentally new viewpoint, which, however, leads to the fact that metaphors are a rigid framework that restricts and, to some extent, controls people's ideas about the world around them.

Much of the current literature on metaphor pays particular attention to its role in politics: the conceptual metaphor theory has proved an adequate methodological tool for analyzing how politicians construct a meaningful and understandable reality for the audience.

Charteris-Black (2006), Mio (1997), and Musolff (2014) have studied the effects of metaphors in politics from different perspectives. Bougher (2012) and Mio (1997) show that the use of metaphors tends to frame political issues, and discuss the metaphorical frames in terms of their influence on people's reactions. Politics seems a complex domain of human experience, too abstract for ordinary citizens to understand. The research, conducted by Thompson, demonstrates that metaphors serve to mitigate this gap by drawing on embodied experiences, which implies linking the individual and the political by providing a way of seeing relations, reifying abstractions, and framing complexity in manageable terms (Thompson, 1996: 185–186).

Politicians use metaphors to create the image of themselves, their opponents and to characterize their ideas and agendas. Metaphors often serve as an instrument to achieve the goals of politicians who rely on experiences familiar to

the public to present new target domains (Liu & Wang, 2020; Chilton & Lakoff, 1999; Fu & Yuan, 2017). Charteris-Black (2011) and Mio (1997) argue that the use of specific source domains leads to arousing emotions, which further helps to realize persuasion, and, thus, affects the way people understand politics. Previous studies have reported that the source domains of person/personification, animal, family, disease, journey, war, and sport are actively used in portraying political and social reality (Goschler, 2005; Harvey, 2014; Jing-Schmidt, 2016; Musolff, 2014).

Still, there have been relatively few studies examining the influence of metaphors in politics on Chinese language material. Weng (2013) comes to the conclusion that political positions influence the selection of metaphors. Wageche and Chi (2017) examine Xi Jinping's and Barack Obama's choice of the source domains of metaphors in understanding the target domain Diplomacy. Liu and Wang (2020) explain how metaphors are chosen and used from the Chinese perspective, which provides a better understanding of the changes in Chinese diplomacy. Jing-Schmidt (2016) studies the social functions of metaphor in Chinese.

This view is supported by Russian scholars. Telia (1998) suggests that the frequent use of metaphor in political discourse arises from the fact that it is a universal way of knowing and conceptualizing the world around us. Fedoseev (2018) notes that metaphors are the most important means of assessing the socio-political situation. Moreover, Fedeneva (1997) states that political events can lead to creating new metaphorical models that figuratively reflect the political reality.

Few studies have examined the use of metaphor in social media platforms so far. Though, there is a consensus among linguists that metaphor is one of the most common conceptual means in social networks, aimed at discussing and disseminating political news, as an utterance limited in time and space leads to the frequent use of metaphors.

Chen, Li, Chen, and Yuan (2019) propose R-Map (Reposting Map), a visual analytical approach with a map metaphor to get an overview of a large number of information repostings in social media. Ma, Cui, Ji, and Xue (2020)

introduce a metaphor map into the visual design of social media data related to emergency demands. Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) explore the metaphor of improvisation theater to identify some means of branding in social media. Piata (2016) analyzes the relationship between metaphor and humor and its impact on election campaign advertizing. Van den Heerik, Droog, Fa, and Burgers (2020) discover how metaphor production can be stimulated by social media cues in an Internet environment. Wei (2003) concludes that politicians use metaphors to show their wit or engage in a power struggle.

There have been relatively few studies focusing on the target domains "China-Russia relations" in social media (Boiko & Solopova, 2021; Budaev et al., 2021; Solopova et al., 2020). The authors study dominant metaphors that produce the images of the future of Russia in Chinese and American social media during the period of anti-Russian sanctions (from 2014 to the present). The aim of the present study is to continue the research that focuses on the metaphorical future of China-Russia relations.

Source of the material, procedures of data retrieval

Both the rise of China and Russia's comeback to the world stage heated social media debate on their current and future relations. The history and peculiarities of the bilateral relations between the two countries in the past and present, their strategic interaction and coordination in solving geopolitical problems, linking national development strategies, strengthening friendly ties between the peoples of Russia and China are the extralinguistic factors that influence the modeling of the image of China-Russia relations in the discourse of the People's Republic of China and cause the increased attention of the Chinese social media to the problems of the present and future of the relations. Therefore, the target domain is China-Russia relations in the context of the current anti-Russian (from 2014 to the present) and anti-Chinese sanctions (from 2020 till the present).

The study of the image of China-Russia relations is based on the material of Chinese social media. The choice of the Chinese discourse is explained by the fact that, on the one hand,

the countries are important geopolitical and economic partners; on the other hand, they are leading competitors of world powers for the leadership role.

The source of the research material is 悟空问答 (Wukong Q&A), a popular web-based opinion-sharing service where citizens discuss current events and issues, including international politics. The reason for choosing this forum is its convenience, openness and popularity among Chinese people, seeking answers to their questions.

Wukong Q&A, an online question-and-answer community, that brings together users from all walks of life, was launched in Beijing in 2016. As a new way to obtain information and stimulate discussion, the mission of Wukong Q&A is to increase the total amount of knowledge in the human world, eliminate information inequality and promote mutual understanding between people. Though Chiu, Ip, and Silverman (2012) note that China's social-media sector is very fragmented and local, nevertheless, it can

be described as a more open, less biased form of communication, compared to traditional media, as it is more difficult for the public sector and government to control web-based media than other data channels.

The Wukong community follows the big data intelligent recommendation algorithm. The intelligent recommendation mode of "Your Editor" can activate the user's interest points and greatly improve the user's attachment (百度百科 the Chinese online encyclopedia 'Baidu Baike').

The site is equipped with an automatic search manager. Users' responses to questions about the present and future of China-Russia relations were automatically selected as the material for the study. The selection of the material focused on the key characters: 中国 (China), 俄罗斯 (Russia), 关系 (relations), 制裁 (sanctions) (Fig. 1).

Figure 1 shows the answers obtained to the question 美国制裁俄罗斯的根本原因是什么? (What is the root cause of US sanctions against Russia). There is an opportunity to show

The screenshot shows a forum page with the following content:

- Header:** 头条问答 搜索你感兴趣的问题
- Question:** 美国制裁俄罗斯的根本原因是什么?
- Answers:**
 - User: 房子297房小平 (03-11 09:58)**

枪打出头鸟，美国很明白，俄罗斯强大，论军事实力，不比美国差，在有些方面，甚至超过美，这样的对手，威胁到美国，美国从来是，自己是老大，都要听他的，否则就翻脸，制裁打击他，俄撞枪口上，看不惯美国，处处对着干，美国很恼火，非要整死他，不然会失去，统霸全世界，超级大国的，事实也证明，有俄罗斯在，美不敢咋的，只能经济上，制裁俄罗斯，但毫无作用，因为有中国，支持俄罗斯，强大的后盾。
 - User: 洗过的白衬衣 (03-08 17:34)**

军事层面上，俄罗斯依然是世界第二，是当今世界唯一能和美国抗衡的国家，其核弹存量美国不相上下，这也是美国最为忌惮俄罗斯的主要原因。

但俄罗斯有一个致命弱点，就是经济基础薄弱。趁你病要你命，美国通过和西方国家的联盟制裁，已经使俄罗斯经济低迷，就算有强人普京硬撑着，现在也只有半条命的样子了。又怎么会有过多的钱来研发高科技武器！

美国维持世界霸权的两大主要支柱就是美元霸权和军事霸权。除了俄罗斯，谁还能与他抗衡？

总之，美国制裁俄罗斯的目的就是维护自己在全球的军事霸权。

Fig. 1. Wukong Q&A

reactions to the question and users' comments by leaving a comment under them, evaluating them (show 'like' or 'dislike') and share this question or comments with your friends.

The selection results, including each user's questions and comments, were displayed on the main page and sorted by relevance. The thematic dominant of the material is anti-Russian and anti-Chinese sanctions – restrictive measures “planned or imposed by the sanctioning country against the opposing country and aimed at hindering the development of the opposing country or changing its foreign and domestic policy in a direction favorable to the initiator of the sanctions” (Boiko, 2020: 13).

During the period of anti-Russian and anti-Chinese sanctions, Wukong Q&A, where users can discuss the actions of heads of state, politicians, and the possible consequences of the ongoing sanctions policy of the United States and European countries against Russia and China, has become particularly popular. It seems relevant and promising to study China's social media, which will allow for revealing the images of relations between China and Russia.

Methods

The present study draws upon the conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) and is carried out within the methodology developed by Russian linguists (Solopova & Chudinov, 2018). The method involves the study of metaphorical systems, metaphorical models and their components (frames and slots).

Chudinov sees a metaphorical system as a set of metaphorical models fixed in a particular discourse. It is an integral part of the national worldview and mentality, closely connected with the history of the people and the current socio-political situation (Chudinov, 2012).

A metaphorical model is treated as a relation between conceptual domains that exist in the minds of native speakers, where the frame system of the source domain serves as a basis for modeling the conceptual system of a new conceptual domains. The emotional charge of the concepts constituting the source domain is usually preserved, which creates extensive opportunities for influencing the reader's emotional and volitional sphere in the

process of communicative activity (Chudinov et al., 2020).

A frame is understood as a fragment of the metaphorical model that structures the source domain, while a slot is an element of the situation that includes a part of the frame, some aspect of its concretization.

Thus, analyzing the system of metaphorical models includes quantitative and meaningful processing:

- fixing metaphors,
- constructing a system of metaphorical models,
- determining the frequency of their use,
- distributing metaphors on the frequency scale,
- identifying dominant metaphorical models,
- structuring each metaphorical model,
- determining the most frequent frames and slots,
- establishing the emotional charge of the metaphor.

The method can help to understand how metaphors affect the interpretations of social media representations of China-Russia relations and explain the role of the national and ideological contexts metaphors are produced in.

In the study metaphors with the target domain “China-Russia relations” were manually selected from the formed array, automatically selected in the previous stage, and classified according to their source domains. For structuring and analyzing metaphors, we characterized the target domain, the source domain, the component that connects both domains and determines the possibility of metaphorical projection, the frame structure of the model, and the emotional charge of the metaphor.

Since the target domain is the same (China-Russia relations), the mark-up of each metaphorical context as a preparatory stage includes the indication of a source domain (SD), a frame (F), a slot (S), neutral (0), negative (–) or positive (+) emotional charge (C) that the metaphor implements in the context. For example,

1) 俄罗斯和中国都是美国要消灭的敌人! 这是绝对不会改变的, 美国现在和将来,

都会用尽一切丑鄙手段想法消灭俄罗斯和中国的!

‘Russia and China are enemies that the United States wants to destroy! This will never change. Now and in the future the United States will try its best to eliminate Russia and China by all *ugly mean methods of thinking!*’

The mark-up of the context is as follows:

Organism (SD)

Body parts (F)

Head (S),

- (C).

Then, the marked contexts are grouped in separate documents according to their source domains for further statistical and meaningful processing. Statistical processing consists of fixing the whole spectrum of metaphors, constructing a system of metaphorical models, determining the frequency of their use, ordering the metaphors on the frequency scale and identifying dominant metaphorical models. In the next stage, each metaphorical model is structured, the most frequent frames and slots are determined, and their emotional charge is defined.

Results

The results of the quantitative processing are presented in Table 1 (metaphor models are

ranked by frequency, 250 fixed metaphors are taken as 100 %). In Chinese social media the metaphorical system with the target domain “China-Russia relations” comprises more than 14 source domains; the most frequent of them are Organism, Inanimate nature, Animal, Game, and War.

The focus here is on the dominant source domains. The material yields numerous examples depicting China-Russia relations as Organism. Lakoff and Johnson point out that the body metaphor is one of the most popular sources of metaphors in modeling the present and the future, which reflects the human’s understanding that every fact in the mind is inherently embodied (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999). Thus, it makes it easier for humans to lay the foundation for understanding the direction the countries choose and the expediency of their movement to the future.

The most frequent source domain is Organism (SD) (Table 2) (*body parts* (F), 3 slots: *head, stomach, legs* (S), 0 (C). In our study, it maps body parts:

2) 因为普京深知唇亡齿寒的道理, 如果中国被搞趴下了, 俄罗斯绝对得不好处, 会紧跟中国后尘甚至后果更严重。

‘Because Putin is *well aware* of the truth that if China is *pushed down*, Russia will

Table 1. Metaphorical system with the target domain “China-Russia relations”.

	Source domain	Total % (Frequency)
1	Organism	32.8 (82)
2	Inanimate nature	16(40)
3	Animal	10.8(27)
4	Game	9.2(23)
5	War	7.2(18)
6	Relationship	6.8(17)
7	Criminality	4.8(12)
8	Monarchy	2.4(6)
9	Sport	2(5)
10	Theatre	1.2(3)
11	Space	1.2(3)
12	Disease	0.8(2)
13	Mechanism	0.4(1)
14	Home	0.4(1)
15	Others	4(10)

Table 2. Frames of the metaphorical model "Organism".

Body parts	Physiological actions	Organs of psyche
48.78(40)	42.68(35)	8.53(7)

definitely not benefit, and *will follow China's footsteps* or even have more serious consequences.'

The metaphor discloses the potential of the bilateral relations. The metaphorical expression 唇亡齿寒 'without the lips, the teeth feel the cold', consisting of four hieroglyphs: 唇 'lip', 亡 'die', 齿 'tooth' and 寒 'cold', means 'intimately interdependent'. The second metaphor is 趴 'lie on one's stomach', followed by another metaphor: 后尘 'sb's footsteps' (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English) leads to the description of Russia's dependence on China. As China is one of Russia's most important political and economic partners, the latter depends on its development or regression. The metaphors represent that Russia will also suffer from China's decay because the two countries are interdependent.

One of the most frequent in the source domain Organism (SD) (body parts (F), back (S), + (C) is the metaphor 背靠背 'back to back':

3) 中俄背靠背的关系应该是不会动摇, 战略上相互支持的态势也不会改变。

'The relationship *'back to back'* between China and Russia should be preserved, then, the situation of strategic support for each other will not change'.

The metaphor describes the mutual support of the two countries in the international area. The metaphorical expression 背靠背 'back to back', consisting of two hieroglyphs: 背 'back' and 靠 'depend on, rely on' (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English), means 'trust and interdependence'. China and Russia are the countries that have an important influence in the world and have a special responsibility for promoting joint development. During the Ukrainian crisis, the relations between the countries have become even stronger both economically and politically. The metaphor profiles the meaning that, despite the pressure of the West, the countries should stick together to resist it.

The metaphor is regularly used in Chinese social media in modeling the future of China-Russia relations with positive emotional charge:

4) 中俄关系牢固了, 两国就能背靠背, 不带包袱地与其他大国握手。

'The *relations between China and Russia are so strong* that the two countries have no problem going back to sleep – not to shake hands with other great powers'.

Here the metaphor 背靠背 'back to back' carries the meaning of complete trust between the two countries. Since none of them has any burden behind (包袱 means 'burden' (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English)), they are open to each other. Thus, the metaphor produces the image of solid relations between Russia and China, built on mutual trust and openness, which creates prospects for their development and further cooperation.

The following metaphors from the source domain Organism (SD) (body parts (F), head (S), hand (S), 0 (C) focus on togetherness of China and Russia, their mutual dependence and joint efforts to stand against the opposition:

5) 美国虽然把中国列为“最严峻的竞争对手”, 但还没有胆量直接跟中国开干, 那么打击、制裁与中国友好的国家就成了美国的必然选项, 加之俄罗斯丝毫不给美国面子, 甚至还与美国对着干, 所以我们看到美国制裁俄罗斯丝毫不手软, 毫无底线无所不用其极。

'Although the United States lists China as its "most serious competitor", it has not yet had the courage to directly oppose China. Then cracking down and sanctioning countries that are friendly to China has become an inevitable option for the United States. In addition, Russia does not give the United States *face at all*, and even fights against the United States, so we can see that the United States will sanction Russia *with no mercy at all*, and will do everything they can without any bottom line'.

The metaphor 给面子 'to consider the feelings of others' consists of three hieroglyphs: 给 'give' 面子 'face'; it is followed by the metaphorical expression 手软 'be soft', having two hieroglyphs: 手 'hand', 软 'soft' (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English). The first metaphor refers to the strength of Russia which is trying to stand up to the United States, despite the

strength of the latter in this struggle. Moreover, this struggle is caused by the fear of the USA to stand against the strong China, which leads to the option of harming its friends. The second metaphor, used with the negative particle 不 ‘not’, means that America will not be soft with Russia and is ready to gather all its forces and beat Russia until it gives up.

The metaphor from the source domain Organism (SD) (physiological actions (F), physical thermoregulation (S), 0 (C) is repeatedly used in social media discourse in the description of China-Russia relations:

6) 中俄关系, 实际上不过是在面对西方强势的情况下迫不得已的抱团取暖……………

‘China-Russia relations are actually nothing more than a last resort to keep warm in the face of Western power…’

The metaphorical expression 抱团取暖 ‘to unite and bask’, consisting of four hieroglyphs: 抱 ‘carry in one’s arms’, 团 ‘unite’, 取 ‘take’ and 暖 ‘warm’, depicts that China and Russia need to cooperate and help each other to stand against the West. The author considers the friendship of China and Russia as a reluctant alliance that has a chance of standing together to face the Western power and survive. Otherwise, the consequences are unpredictable.

The second metaphor ranking in terms of frequency is Inanimate nature (SD) (Table 3) (nature environment (F), natural sources (S), + (C)).

The nature environment metaphor is frequently used to describe the future of China-Russia relations in a positive perspective:

7) 这也不需要中国输血, 因为两国经济互补性太强了, 俄国有天量自然资源为中国所需。

‘It does not need China’s *blood transfusion* because the two countries’ economies are so complementary and Russia has an *abundant supply of natural sources* for China’s needs.’

The first metaphorical expression 输血 ‘transfuse blood’ from the source domain Disease means ‘to give aid and support’. The second one is 天量自然资源 ‘sky/heaven natural resource’ (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English), which means that Russia is rich in natural resources. The expressions illustrate a the profitable cooperation between Russia and China. Since Russia does not depend on China’s support and assistance, this is a great advantage for China, which significantly favors the development of the two countries’ relations. Moreover, the metaphors describe China’s dependence on Russia’s lavish natural resources and depict a profitable future for China since Russia can satisfy its needs.

Another example in the source domain Inanimate nature (SD) is nature environment (F) (mountain rock (S),- (C)):

8) 现代战争打仗就是打的经济实力, 拼基本国力, 试想一下让我国的一个江苏省去对抗美国就是以卵击石, 自不量力。

‘Modern war is to be fought for economic strength and fundamental national strength. Just Imagine: letting a Jiangsu Province of our country fight against the United States is *beating the stone with the egg*, overestimating its capabilities.’

The metaphorical expression 以卵击石 ‘to strike a stone with an egg’, consisting of 4 hieroglyphs: 以 ‘by means of’, 卵 ‘egg’, 击 ‘hit’, 石 ‘stone’ (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English), portrays the confrontation between the USA and Russia. The idiom means ‘to attempt the impossible, to invite disaster by overreaching oneself’ (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English). Since 卵 ‘egg’ is Russia, according to its size, and 石 ‘stone’ is the USA, it implies that it is impossible for Russia to withstand the USA, or even it will bring disaster upon the country if it participates in this war. A remarkable comparison is that the economy of Russia is equivalent to the economy of a province in China – Jiangsu, whose population is more than 80 million and whose GDP in 2020 was 10.27 trillion yuan. By this comparison, the Chinese try to imagine how difficult it must be for Russia to stand up to the USA, because Jiangsu province is only a small part of China’s GDP (百度 ‘Baidu’).

Table 3. Frames of the metaphorical model “Inanimate nature”

Nature environment	Water	Climate	Space (Cosmos)
40(16)	25(10)	20(8)	15(6)

The frequent usage of the frame in the source domain Inanimate nature (SD) (water (F), ice (S), + (C)) is representative of how Russia and its relations, particularly with China and Europe, are portrayed:

9) 当欧俄关系仍处于“冰河时代”之时，莫斯科与北京的关系却继续提升，“中国不断增长的能源饥渴，需要北极熊的喂养”。

‘While the relations between Europe and Russia are still in the “ice age”, the relations between Moscow and Beijing continue to improve, “China’s growing hunger for energy needs the polar bear’s feeding”.’

The use of the metaphor “ice age” depicts the current relationship between Russia and Europe. 冰 ‘ice’ in the figurative sense is a symbol of cold, hostility, and doubt (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English). The metaphor, thus, highlights the intense confrontation between Russia and Europe triggered by the ongoing sanctions policy. The following use of the metaphor “China’s growing hunger for energy” refers to the description of China’s severe energy shortage, which needs external aid. In 2018, it was found that the total electricity consumption of the entire society increased by 8.4 %, of which the share of electricity consumption of the tertiary industries and urban and rural residents in the growth was nearly 50 %. In the future, with the acceleration of the electrification process, the power electricity consumption of the whole society in China will continue to increase, providing further opportunities for China-Russia energy cooperation.

In this example, Russia appears in a positive perspective in the eyes of the Chinese as a polar bear that has a strong force (百度百科 the Chinese online encyclopedia ‘Baidu Baike’) and enough energy sources to meet China’s needs. The metaphors of Russia and China represent their future togetherness and cooperation arising from interdependence.

Another frequent source providing metaphors for the target domain is Animal (SD) (Table 4) (mammals (F), hedgehogs (S), + (C)).

Its use in Chinese social media to represent China-Russia relations is quite specific:

10) 有个很形象的比喻：中俄就像两只刺猬抱团。一方面面对西方的压力，两国不得

Table 4. Frames of the metaphorical model “Animal”

Mammals	Birds	Fish
66.7(18)	18.5(5)	14.8(4)

不抱成一团来对抗。另一方面，双方由于地缘关系，互相都警惕和防范着对方。

‘There is a very imaginative metaphor: China and Russia are two hedgehogs. On the one hand, when faced with Western pressure, both countries must unite to resist it. On the other hand, both are wary of each other because of geopolitical issues.’

The metaphor models the image of the relations between the countries in the present and the future. 刺猬 ‘hedgehog’ is a common term for a class of mammals belonging to the hedgehog subfamily. Adult males are aggressive towards each other, jealously guarding their plots. However, they can share a nest and peacefully coexist, but only when the choice of suitable places is limited (百度百科 the Chinese online encyclopedia ‘Baidu Baike’). The metaphor 刺猬 ‘hedgehog’ represents China and Russia as zealous defenders of their territories, who live not far from each other, but quite apart. The predictive meanings are connected with the fact that if the West tries to influence any of them, the countries will oppose it together and may start to support each other with an intense rapprochement.

It is interesting to note that when conceptualizing China-Russia’s relations in Chinese social media another metaphor of the frame mammals becomes dominant (panther (S),- (C)):

11) 中俄也有矛盾，俄罗斯的远东地区，随着俄罗斯国力的衰弱，对远东地区的控制力下降，俄也担心中国事实上控制远东，或者对远东地区施加过大的压力。毕竟，没人希望自己旁边躺着一头雄狮，哪怕这头雄狮跟你签订了协议说不会伤害你，你相信吗？

‘There are also contradictions between China and Russia. With the decline of Russia’s national strength in the Far East, Russia is worried that China actually controls the Far East, or exerts too much pressure on the Far East. After all, no one wants to have a lion lying next

Table 5. Frames of the metaphorical model "Game".

Sport games	Gambling
65.2(15)	34.8(8)

to them, even if it signs an agreement that it won't hurt you. Do you believe it?"

In this example, 雄狮 'lion' is a predator from the cat family that often ambushes and kills other warm-blooded animals. (百度百科 the Chinese online encyclopedia 'Baidu Baike'). The contextual determinants of the metaphor lead to a depiction of China as a lion and Russia as a warm-blooded animal that can be haunted any minute. The metaphor's target is to describe China's ability to attack Russia in order to control the Far East, despite all agreements.

On the frequency scale, the fourth most common source is Game (SD) (Table 5); its most frequent frame is gambling (card game (S), +/- (C)):

12) 美可对俄下手, 但不敢对中摊牌, 特朗普摊牌的结局世界都看到了, 中美贸易额不降反而暴增, 美至少20年内根本离不开中国。

'The United States can start with Russia, but dare not a *showdown* with China. The world has seen the outcome of Trump's *showdown*. Instead of falling, the volume of Sino-American trade has risen. America is inseparable from China for at least 20 years.'

The example presents the metaphor 摊牌 'put one's cards on the table' (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English), which means to show everything you have to the other side (the metaphor 摊牌 Chinese online encyclopedia 'Baidu Baike'). The metaphor presents the interactions of the three countries as a card game and predicts a possible outcome: since the US does not have the best cards, it will probably start the game with the easiest competitor, Russia, and have a *showdown* in which Russia will be the first to lose the game. After that, the US wants a *showdown* with China, but it turns out that's not possible as China has better cards, based on the past experience that has led to enhancement of Sino-American trade. Thus, there is always a third participant in China-Russia relations:

Table 6. Frames of the metaphorical model "War".

Warfare and military armament	War and its varieties	Organization of military service	The beginning of the war and its results
66.7(12)	16.7(3)	11.1(2)	5.5(1)

either the USA or Europe is trying to interfere in the China-Russia alliance. The metaphorical context reveals a future loss for Russia and a positive outcome for China in the argument with the USA.

Another frequent metaphorical model is War (SD) (Table 6), with the frame "Warfare and military armament" being dominant (warfare (S), + (C)):

13) 美国拿俄罗斯开刀, 这套各个击破的战略, 只要中俄联手, 美国的阴谋将无法得逞。

'The US wants to take Russia *to perform an operation*, and the strategy means *to destroy them one by one*; as long as China and Russia join forces, the US conspiracy will not succeed.'

The metaphor 开刀 'to behead, to single out as a point of attack' and the metaphor 各个击破 'a kind of military strategy in which favorable opportunities are seized and overwhelming military strength is concentrated to defeat the enemy piece by piece to achieve the final victory' (LINE Dictionary Chinese-English) portray the geopolitical situation among Russia, China and the USA as a war zone where the USA will either leave Russia 'headless' or attack first. The author of the response supposes that this is a military strategy of exploiting advantages to defeat one enemy after another. Thus, Russia will be destroyed first, and then the USA will come after China. The metaphors have a negative predictive potential for Russia and China by portraying the future possibilities of defeat. However, the author describes how to avoid this defeat: if China and Russia stay together, they will be able to fight the USA back and the latter will stand no chance against the two countries.

The analysis of the system of metaphorical models fixed in Chinese social media showed

that the most common source domains with the target domain “China-Russia relations” are those of Organism, Inanimate nature, Animal, Game, and War. The data obtained suggest that the metaphors of Inanimate nature, Organism, Animal, and War, prevailing in Chinese social media, predict a prosperous future opportunity for China-Russia relations to join forces and work together in order to stand against their opponent – the USA. However, there is a minority of the negative metaphors from the source domain Animal that predict a potential conflict between Russia and China. The metaphors from Organism domain depict a debilitating future for China and Russia against their common opponent – the USA. Negatively colored metaphors from the source domain Inanimate nature portray a depleting future for Russia. The game metaphors model a future loss for Russia, while they represent a thriving future for China in the game with the USA.

Conclusion

The intensive development of Internet communication and social media provides new opportunities for involving people in the discussion of political news. Regardless of geographical and organizational constraints, people have the opportunity to express their political views. The ideas and opinions ex-

pressed in them may be different from or consistent with those of traditional media, leading to an understanding of how citizens portray the future of China-Russia relations. The findings of the study show that these relations are a debatable and relevant topic in Chinese social media. Metaphor is one of the means that influences people’s understanding of China-Russia relations. The metaphorical system consists of more than 14 metaphorical models; each model is a structured set of frames and slots. The most common source domains, targeting “China-Russia relations”, are Organism, Inanimate nature, Animal, Game, and War. The emotional charge of most metaphors is positive; they predict their interdependent future. The remaining negative metaphors have a pessimistic prediction for China-Russia relations. Even in the latter case, users tend to find a decision that could prevent the bilateral relations from deteriorating and strengthen them in the future. Still, the analysis of texts and talks related to China-Russia relations is yet to be systematically developed. The future prospect for the topic is to study American social media to find out how the country’s citizens portray their opponents’ future – the future of China, Russia, and their bilateral relations in the context of anti-Russia and anti-China sanctions.

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