

## **Multimodal metaphor (re)framing: A critical analysis of the promotional image of China's Hubei Province in the post-pandemic era on new media**

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This study presents multimodal metaphors as (re)framing tools in the analysis of a 10-minute promotional video of Hubei Province produced by the Chinese government and circulated on new media platforms like YouTube, Douyin (Chinese Tik Tok) and WeChat Channels. The video introduces Hubei Province to the world in the pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic stage to erase the prejudiced “Wuhan virus” and “China virus” painted by Western media. Drawing upon MIPVU (the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universitei), multimodality of metaphors, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study analyzes how the Chinese government attempts to reframe Hubei as a place of courage, prosperity and humanity via metaphors like WAR, BRIDGE, HAND and BACK. The benefits and drawbacks of such metaphor usage are also discussed with appropriate contextual and socio-cultural relevancies. The study provides a hands-on practice of the CDA-based analysis of multimodal metaphors and justifies the feasibility of integrating translation, metaphor and semiotic studies through the sociological theory of framing.

**Keywords:** metaphor; multimodality; (re)framing; new media; Coronavirus; Wuhan

### **Introduction**

A plethora of studies have noticed the importance of metaphor in the coronavirus discourse, most of which concern how the pandemic was framed in news (Taylor and Kidgell 2021) and on social media (Olza et al. 2021), and why one metaphor (FIRE) is

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more beneficial than another (WAR) in pandemic health communication (Semino 2021).

Nonetheless, the object of such study has been verbal metaphors while multimodal metaphors have received insufficient attention (Forceville 2009, 19). Although Abdel-Raheem's (2021) study is an exception, examining the multimodality of covid metaphors, it was confined to political cartoons and the Palestinian culture.

The current study concurs with Machin (2013, 347) that “discourses are communicated through different kinds of semiotic resources, different modes, and realized through different genres”. In specific, a 10-minute promotional video of Hubei Province (the initial epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic) produced by the Chinese official government and circulated on new media platforms such as YouTube, Douyin (Chinese Tik Tok), Weibo, Twitter and WeChat channels has been selected for the analysis. Previous findings already reveal that modes of information presentation (i.e., text-picture mixed, picture-based and video-based) impact human thinking and behavior (Hsieh and Chen 2010). This study engages the theory of metaphorical framing (Burgers, Konijn, and Steen 2016; Semino, Demjén, and Demmen 2018) to better explore how a video representation serves as a semiotic resource to lead the audience's (re)conceptualization of the “notorious” Wuhan City, Hubei Province during the pandemic. Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1995) was selected as an appropriate framework for construing meanings from text, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice and for describing, interpreting and explaining the findings.

### **Multimodality of metaphor**

According to Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), metaphors are ways of talking about complex concepts that can be characterized with the formula *A IS B*, where target domain (*A*) is fathomed through source domain (*B*) (Lakoff and Johnson 2008). More recently, Kövecses (2020, 51) developed Extended Conceptual Metaphor Theory (ECMT) which

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incorporated a multilevel view of metaphor. ECMT identifies the conceptual structures of image schemas, domains, frames and mental spaces involved in metaphor construal based on schematicity. Both CMT and ECMT acknowledge two facts about metaphor: firstly, the bi-directional nature of mapping between abstract and concrete concepts; secondly, the pervasiveness of metaphor across various modes of communication, e.g., texts, pictures, videos and sounds.

Despite such a wide recognition of the pervasiveness of metaphors across different modes of communication in academia, the existing literature predominantly focuses on verbal metaphors (Forceville 2009, 19). Against this backdrop, multimodality of metaphors is a burgeoning field of research. Multimodal metaphors are defined as metaphors “whose target and source are rendered exclusively or predominantly in two different modes/modalities” (Forceville and Urios-Aparisi 2009, 4). The present study borrows Forceville’s (2009, 22) definition of mode as “a sign system interpretable because of a specific perception process”, with a specific focus on verbal metaphors and visual metaphors. Scholarship in multimodal metaphors has touched upon advertisement (Pérez-Sobrino 2017), film (Kappelhoff and Müller 2011) and TV commercials (Forceville 2007). The contemporary media age provides new materials for the multimodal metaphor research as internet and computer-mediated communication, social network sites and mobile phones transform intercultural communication (Shuter 2012). In this study, one model example of metaphor in multimodal media (a 10-minute promotional video of Hubei Province) is analyzed based on Kövecses’s (2020) ECMT and Forceville’s (2009) multimodality of metaphors. The selection of this video will be elaborated in the Research Data and Methodology Section.

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### **Metaphorical framing**

Framing is a sociological term, where frames are basic elements that enable the identification and examination of the organization of experience (Goffman 1974, 11).

Entman (1993) also gives a simplified definition of framing (*italics original*):

Framing essentially involves *selection* and *salience*. To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described. (Entman 1993, 52)

The notion of “frame” and “framing” is well suited to the concept of metaphor as domains are mapped via an unconscious or conscious highlighting and hiding process (Deignan 2005, 299). In fact, Entman (1991, 7) also holds that frames can be constructed and embodied in metaphors. On the other hand, metaphor scholars have recently begun to study how metaphorical framing of certain concepts across time can shape our understanding of the world, such as free economy (Zeng, Burgers and Ahrens 2021) and refugee (Benczes and SÁgvári 2021). In specific, the framing power of metaphor partly originates from its capabilities to “express, reflect, and reinforce different ways of sense of particular aspects of our lives” (Semino, Demjén, and Demmen 2018, 625). The study borrows their definition of framing and utilizes this concept to examine how the Chinese government employs multimodal metaphors to reframe the images of Hubei Province after a coronavirus outbreak in Wuhan City.

### **Analytical framework**

To the purposes stated above, this study avoids a paradigmatic view of methodologies in favor of a more eclectic approach that selects methods to suite the matter under investigation. Specifically, the study draws upon corpus tools to identify metaphors,

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borrowing framing analysis and applies it to Translation Studies to locate (re)framing strategies, and utilizes Critical Discourse Analysis to describe, interpret and discuss the results.

### ***Corpus approach to metaphor identification***

In the field of metaphor studies, the replicability of metaphor identification has been problematic, yet it is one for which corpus tools may offer a feasible solution. The Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) developed by Pragglejaz Group (2007) has been widely adopted because it systematically identifies the metaphoricity of a linguistic utterance based on its contrasting basic and contextual meanings. However, one drawback of MIP is that it is unable to generate an exhaustive list of metaphors and requires some degree of subjective interpretation. As a counterbalance, Steen et al.'s (2010) updated version of MIP, i.e., the MIPVU (the Metaphor Identification Procedure Vrije Universiteit), defines lexical units in a less broad sense in order to “guarantee a consistent discourse perspective on the relation between words, concepts, and referents”, e.g., “the distinction between word classes” (21). Moreover, unlike MIP which restricts its attention to indirect expressions of metaphor, MIPVU also includes direct expressions, such as *simile* and *analogy* (21), which leads to more comprehensive and fine-grained analytical results. For these reasons, MIPVU is preferred over other models in the current study. Both MIP and MIPVU are corpus-based as they refer to corpus-based online dictionaries such as Macmillan Dictionary ([www.macmillandictionary.com](http://www.macmillandictionary.com)) and take collocates and semantic prosody into account when analyzing the contextual meanings. The detailed procedures of MIPVU is provided in Chapter 2 of Steen et al.'s (2010) book. MIPVU can also be applied to Chinese texts (Wang et al. 2019).

Metaphors involve mappings of two domains, and thereby the source and target domain verification of a metaphorical utterance is of equal importance. Traditionally,

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researchers make their judgements intuitively, and Stefanowitsch (2006) offers a more rigorous corpus-based approach. However, this approach only focuses on “a limited collection of lexemes under a certain source domain (either based on manual selection or keyword analysis)” (Ahrens and Jiang 2020, 43), which is time-consuming and incapable of exhausting the metaphor list. Against this backdrop, Ahrens and Jiang (2020) came up with the first systematic methodology for verifying what source domain a metaphorical keyword belongs to. Their Source Domain Verification Procedure (SDVP) is corpus-based in nature, drawing upon the Suggested Upper Merged Ontology (SUMO, [www.ontologyportal.org](http://www.ontologyportal.org)), WordNet ([wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn](http://wordnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn)), Handian Dictionary ([www.zdic.net](http://www.zdic.net)), and the Word Sketch function in Sketch Engine ([www.sketchengine.eu](http://www.sketchengine.eu)) (see, Ahrens and Jiang [2020, 47] for a detailed flow chart). SDVP has been applied to the analysis of both Chinese and English texts to identify source domains, and target domains are usually determined in contexts (see Ahrens and Jiang 2020; Zeng, Burgers and Ahrens 2021). Thus, the present study follows MIPVU to identify metaphors, SDVP to identify source domains and contextual clues to identify target domains.

Furthermore, MIPVU and SDVP are applicable to visual metaphors and multimodal metaphors, although they require a few extra steps to process. Following Bounegru and Forceville’s (2011) practice, the study categorizes metaphors into multimodal metaphors (with a verbal source and a visual target or a visual source and a verbal target) and monomodal metaphors (monomodal verbal metaphors and monomodal visual metaphors). Some examples are provided here to illustrate the coding procedures for metaphoricity, domains and metaphor types.

***Example 1 (COVID-19 IS WAR; Monomodal verbal metaphor)***

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ST: 在华外国友人和留学生主动“请战”。

TT: International friends and foreign students volunteered to join the battle against the virus.

- 1) Metaphoricity<sup>2</sup>: the basic meaning of “战” in the source text (ST) and “war” in the target text (TT) in the Macmillan Dictionary and Handian Dictionary is “fighting between two or more countries that involves the use of armed forces”. This contrasts with the contextual meaning where virus becomes an “enemy” to fight with. Thus, they are marked as metaphorical.
- 2) Source domain: according to SUMO, “war” has an equivalent mapping of “WAR”<sup>3</sup>. “战” was not included in SUMO entries. Since its meaning is equivalent to “war”, its mapping can also be summarized as “WAR”.
- 3) Target domain: based on a close reading of the text (see “against the virus” in TT), it can be determined that the issue that the metaphorical expressions relate to is COVID-19.
- 4) Metaphor type: since the source and target domains are in the same verbal mode, they are labelled as monomodal metaphors.

**Example 2 (BLEAKNESS IS EMPTY BRIDGE; Monomodal visual metaphor)**

Image without text



- 1) Metaphoricity: first, label the element in the picture as “an empty bridge”, thereby transferring the image into the verbal text. Next, follow MIPVU to determine its metaphoricity. We refer to the Macmillan Dictionary for the basic meaning of both “empty” and “bridge” and summarize the basic meaning of “empty bridge” as “a road that goes over a river contains nothing”. This contrasts with the context of Wuhan City as a metropolis congested with traffic. Thus, we label the image of an “empty bridge” as metaphorical.

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<sup>2</sup> Due to the word limit, the step-by-step MIPVU/SDVP procedures are not detailed here. Only the key decision-making processes are described.

<sup>3</sup> Please see <https://sigma.ontologyportal.org:8443/sigma/WordNet.jsp?word=war&POS=0>

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- 2) Source domain: according to SUMO, “bridge” has an equivalent mapping of “BRIDGE”<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the source domain can be directly summarized as “EMPTY BRIDGE”.
- 3) Target domain: based on the context, it can be summarized the issue that relates to the metaphorical expression is the “bleakness of the city during COVID-19”.
- 4) Metaphor type: since there is no text accompanying this metaphor, it is a monomodal visual metaphor.

### **Example 3 (UNITY IS FIST; Multimodal metaphor)**



International friends and foreign students volunteered to join the battle against the virus.

- 1) Metaphoricity: first, we label the element in the picture as “fist”. Next, we follow MIPVU to determine its metaphoricity: we refer to the Macmillan Dictionary for its basic meaning, namely “your hand when your fingers are closed tightly”. The linguistic context “join the battle against the virus” has linked “fist” with “war”, contrasting the basic meaning with its contextual meaning. Hence, we label it as a metaphorical usage.
- 2) Source domain: according to SUMO, “fist” has an equivalent mapping of “FIST”<sup>5</sup>. Thus, the target domain can be directly summarized as “FIST”.
- 3) Target domain: based on a close reading of the text, we can see the related issue here is “unity in the war against COVID-19”.
- 4) Metaphor type: since the metaphor has a visual source domain and a verbal target domain, it is regarded as a multimodal metaphor.

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<sup>4</sup> Please see <https://sigma.ontologyportal.org:8443/sigma/WordNet.jsp?word=bridge&POS=0>

<sup>5</sup> Please see <https://sigma.ontologyportal.org:8443/sigma/WordNet.jsp?word=fist&POS=0>

### ***Reframing analysis in Translation Studies***

In Translation Studies, a broad array of research follows Goffman's (1974) framing analysis, where translation is depicted as a set of frames (Almanna and Gu 2021). Although translation scholars have previously utilized the principles of framing analysis, they seldom focus on metaphor as a frame or metaphor translation as reframing.

Investigations of metaphor in Translation Studies mainly regard metaphor as a "cultural marker" (Smecca 2009) and metaphor translation as a "cross-cultural" activity (Ghanooni 2014). This study proposes that reframing in the process of translating metaphors is to adjust the ways of making sense of the world, re-interpreting them with other metaphorical conceptualizations. Given that the study of metaphor is at the heart of this current research interest, the metaphor transfer methods are adopted as the framing strategies. Toury's (2012) six-fold classification is utilized since it is complete and comprehensive: retaining (M-M), substituting (M1-M2), paraphrasing (M-P), omitting (M-O), creating (O-M)<sup>6</sup> and from non-metaphor to metaphor (P-M). Some of the nomenclature from other frameworks have been used for ease of reference (see Table 1), where they encapsulate the various metaphor classifications of Toury's system (Sjørup, 2013; Shuttleworth, 2017; and Pedersen, 2017).

**Table 1.** Metaphor transfer methods in literature

Related studies	Proposed transfer methods
Toury (2012)	(1) metaphor into 'same' metaphor; (2) metaphor into 'different' metaphor; (3) metaphor into non-metaphor; (4) metaphor into <i>0</i> (i.e., complete omission, leaving no trace in the target text); (5) non-metaphor into metaphor; (6) <i>0</i> into metaphor (i.e., addition, pure and simple, with no linguistic motivation in the source text).
Sjørup (2013)	(1) M-M (direct transfer of image); (2) M-P (paraphrasing); (3) M1-M2 (a shift from one semantic domain to another or substitution)

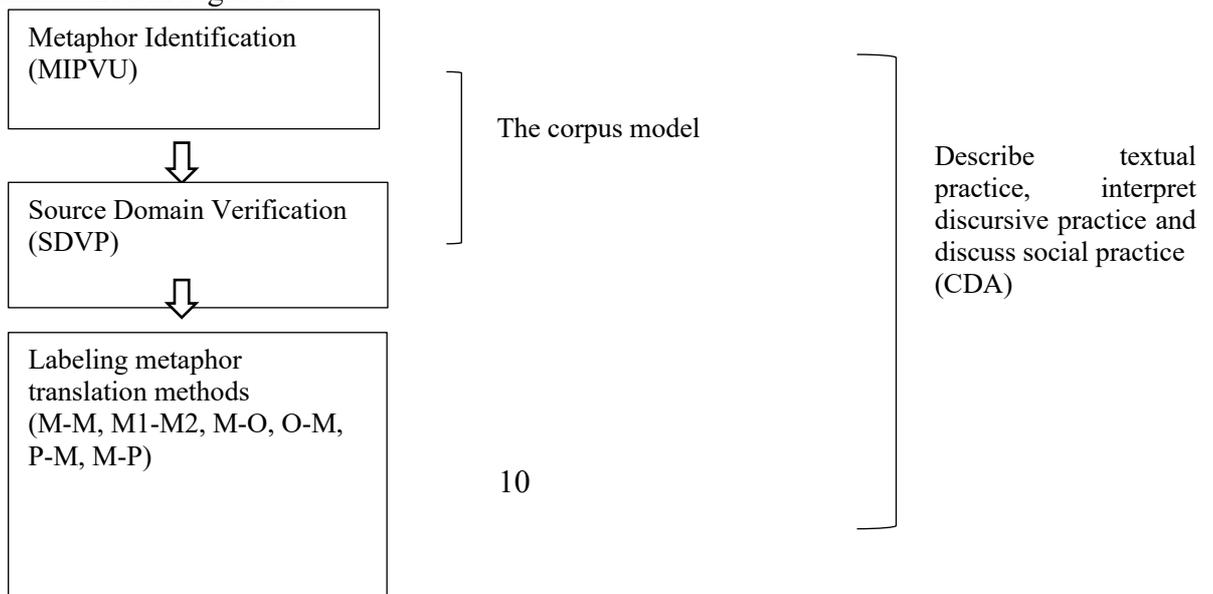
<sup>6</sup> M-O and O-M are equivalent to Toury's M-0 and 0-M. The study uses the alphabetical "O" rather than the numerical "0" in order to make sure the six translation strategies alphabetically consistent.

Shuttleworth (2017)	(1) retaining; (2) removing; (3) omitting; (4) adding
Pedersen (2017)	(1) transfer; (2) substitution; (3) reduction to sense; (4) omission; (5) compensation

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### ***Critical Discourse Analysis***

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a research paradigm or framework that focuses on power inequality, identity, and ideology (Fairclough 1995). CDA-based analyses construe meanings from three levels: text; discourse practice; and, sociocultural practice (Fairclough 1995). It describes, interprets, and explains textual facts from linguistic, social, political, and ideological perspectives. Thus, CDA is a three-dimensional framework based on which Zhang (2020) develops a three-dimensional analytical framework for metaphor translation analysis. Zhang's approach to identify metaphor in translation is essentially a description of the different text practices. Interpreting how these metaphorical expressions constitute different conceptual metaphors in the source and target texts is similarly an interpretation of different discursive practice. Finally, differences in metaphor use and framing strategies can illustrate the socio-cultural and political principles at the level of social practice (see Zhang [2020, 152], Figure 6.1). The study adopts Zhang's (2020) framework as it initiates the CDA-based analysis of the translation of multimodal metaphors, and incorporates corpora and framing analysis to further enrich the analysis. In general, the analytical framework of the current study can be summarized in Figure 1.



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—> Framing strategy analysis

**Figure 1.** Flowchart of the analytical model of metaphor translation-based reframing.

### **Research data and methodology**

On April 12, 2021, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China and Hubei Provincial People’s Government jointly held a special event titled “Heroic Hubei: Reborn for New Glories” to introduce Hubei Province at each of the pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic stages<sup>7</sup>. It aims to reframe Hubei as a heroic province which has defeated the Coronavirus pandemic to replace its image as the culprit, responsible for the spread of Coronavirus. A 10-minute promotional video was played at that event and then circulated on local and international social media platforms.

Several Chinese official accounts including the Global Times, New China TV, Spokesperson China, Yangtze River News and Hubei Daily have posted and reposted this video on YouTube, Douyin (Chinese Tik Tok) and WeChat Channels, where it has received more than half a million reviews and hundreds of thousands of likes and comments. It has visual images, verbal English narrations and Chinese subtitles. Table 2 illustrates the research data. The video lasts 602 seconds, consisting of 104 metaphorical picture shots. It has 1,924 words of Chinese source text (ST) and 1,313 words of English target text (TT), including 40 metaphorical expressions in ST and 37 metaphorical expressions in TT.

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<sup>7</sup> The official website of the special event, “Heroic Hubei: Reborn for New Glories” is [http://en.hubei.gov.cn/special/hubeiglories\\_2021/index.shtml](http://en.hubei.gov.cn/special/hubeiglories_2021/index.shtml) and one YouTube link for the promotional video is <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hc2ytmfE9J0>

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**Table 2.** Research data illustration

	video		verbal (Chinese ST)	verbal (English TT)
time length	602 seconds	word count	1,924	1,313
metaphorical shots (count)	104	metaphorical expressions (count)	40	37

Videos, which usually do not last long, are being played in the opening of an event such as this. Although the dataset of the research is relatively small, it was considered useful for two reasons: first, it has achieved vast popularity in the Chinese and international news media including, but not limited to, YouTube, Douyin and WeChat Channels; second, it is the only officially released video by the Chinese government to promote Hubei's post-pandemic images. Its generic political associations with the government makes it an ideal case study of how multimodal metaphors facilitate or impede meaning transfer and national image construction, especially in a country like China that is culturally and politically divergent from Western countries. By demonstrating the potential for studying the framing power of multimodal metaphors, we hope that our study may open up a new way to analyze the inter-relationship among translation, metaphor and semiotic studies which has been under-explored so far.

Following the steps listed in the analytical framework, a linguist with previous experience of metaphor coding has coded and re-coded the datasets on the qualitative analyzer software NVivo 12. Deviations were resolved through discussions with another expert in the field of metaphor studies. Intra-coder reliability, rather than inter-coder reliability, was selected because the former guarantees the consistency and transparency of the coding, whereas the latter “would not have reduced the ‘subjectivity’ of the coding *per se*” (Bednarek 2015, 6), but would only ensure the consistency in using the coding manual.

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### Metaphor description

Results demonstrate that 77 metaphorical expressions (40 in the verbal source text, VST and 37 in the verbal target text, VTT) are coded in 21 source domains in texts and 104 metaphorical pictorial shots (PS) are coded in 17 source domains (see Table 3). The three sub-corpora (VST, VTT and PS) share HUMAN and SEASON metaphors. Nevertheless, WAR metaphors are exclusive to texts (30% in VST and 29.73% in VTT), being completely absent from PS. By contrast, ROAD, TRANSPORTATION, HAND, BRIDGE, LIGHT and CLOCK metaphors are unique to PS.

**Table 3.** Source domains of metaphors in the source text, the target text and shots of data

Metaphors in VST			Metaphors in VTT			Metaphors in PS		
	Freq.	%		Freq.	%		Freq.	%
<i>War</i>	12	30.00	<i>War</i>	11	29.73	<i>Road</i>	22	21.15
<i>Human</i>	10	25.00	<i>Human</i>	10	27.03	<i>Transportation</i>	20	19.23
<i>Season</i>	3	7.50	<i>Season</i>	2	5.41	<i>Hand</i>	15	14.42
<i>Mechanics</i>	2	5.00	<i>Home</i>	2	2.70	<i>Door</i>	8	7.69
<i>Weather</i>	1	2.50	<i>Demon</i>	1	5.41	<i>Bridge</i>	7	6.73
<i>Fire</i>	1	2.50	<i>Mechanics</i>	1	2.70	<i>Light</i>	7	6.73
<i>Competition</i>	1	2.50	<i>Weather</i>	1	2.70	<i>Back</i>	7	6.73
<i>Corridor</i>	1	2.50	<i>Corridor</i>	1	2.70	<i>Season</i>	4	3.85
<i>Demon</i>	1	2.50	<i>Danger</i>	1	2.70	<i>Clock</i>	3	2.88
<i>Home</i>	1	2.50	<i>Door</i>	1	2.70	<i>Human</i>	2	1.92
<i>Rebirth</i>	1	2.50	<i>Rebirth</i>	1	2.70	<i>Animal</i>	2	1.92
<i>Race</i>	1	2.50	<i>Race</i>	1	2.70	<i>Harvest</i>	2	1.92
<i>Physical entity</i>	1	2.50	<i>Container</i>	1	2.70	<i>Ambulance</i>	1	0.96
<i>Net</i>	1	2.50	<i>Sky</i>	1	2.70	<i>Green field</i>	1	0.96
<i>Highway</i>	1	2.50	<i>Aperted land</i>	1	2.70	<i>Hospital</i>	1	0.96
<i>Sky</i>	1	2.50	<i>Hustle life</i>	1	2.70	<i>Mask</i>	1	0.96
<i>Hustle life</i>	1	2.50				<i>Sun</i>	1	0.96
<b>Total</b>	40	100.00	<b>Total</b>	37	100.00	<b>Total</b>	104	100.00

To further explore the use of verbal and visual metaphors in the dataset, the study also classifies metaphor types by their source domains (see Table 4). WAR metaphors exclusively fall into monomodal verbal metaphors (both source and target texts), whereas ROAD, TRANSPORTATION, BRIDGE, LIGHT, HAND, CLOCK, HARVEST

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metaphors are exclusively monomodal visual metaphors. Meanwhile, there are multimodal metaphors whose source and target domain are exclusively from verbal texts and pictorial shots, such as HAND, DOOR, BACK, SEASON, HUMAN, ANIMAL, CORRIDOR, REBIRTH metaphors.

**Table 4.** Classifying metaphor types by source domains

Monomodal verbal metaphor in ST		Monomodal verbal metaphor in TT		Monomodal visual metaphor		Multimodal metaphor					
Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%				
<i>War</i>	12	35.29	<i>War</i>	11	35.48	<i>Road</i>	22	30.14	<i>Hand</i>	8	22.86
<i>Human</i>	10	29.41	<i>Human</i>	10	32.26	<i>Transportation</i>	20	27.40	<i>Door</i>	8	22.86
<i>Mechanics</i>	2	5.88	<i>Home</i>	2	3.23	<i>Bridge</i>	7	9.59	<i>Back</i>	7	20.00
<i>Demon</i>	1	2.94	<i>Mechanics</i>	1	3.23	<i>Light</i>	7	9.59	<i>Season</i>	4	11.43
<i>Race</i>	1	2.94	<i>Demon</i>	1	3.23	<i>Hand</i>	7	9.59	<i>Human</i>	2	5.71
<i>Fire</i>	1	2.94	<i>Race</i>	1	3.23	<i>Clock</i>	3	4.11	<i>Hustle life</i>	2	5.71
<i>Sky</i>	1	2.94	<i>Container</i>	1	3.23	<i>Harvest</i>	2	2.74	<i>Animal</i>	2	5.71
<i>Weather</i>	1	2.94	<i>Aparted land</i>	1	3.23	<i>Ambulance</i>	1	1.37	<i>Corridor</i>	1	2.86
<i>Net</i>	1	2.94	<i>Sky</i>	1	3.23	<i>Green field</i>	1	1.37	<i>Rebirth</i>	1	2.86
<i>Competition</i>	1	2.94	<i>Weather</i>	1	3.23	<i>Hospital</i>	1	1.37			
<i>Physical entity</i>	1	2.94	<i>Danger</i>	1	6.45	<i>Mask</i>	1	1.37			
<i>Highway</i>	1	2.94				<i>Sun</i>	1	1.37			
<i>home</i>	1	2.94									
<b>Total</b>	34	100.00	<b>Total</b>	31	100.00	<b>Total</b>	73	100.00	<b>Total</b>	35	100.00

Monomodal visual metaphors were not translated socio-culturally as the target audience understand the implied meanings directly from the images. Nevertheless, monomodal verbal metaphors and multimodal metaphors involve a textual translation. Table 5 elaborates the (re)framing strategies adopted to translate different metaphors. Although these (re)framing strategies are six-fold, only three of them were found in the dataset, including M-M, M-O, and O-M. In most cases, the M-M strategy is utilized in the metaphors of WAR, HUMAN and SEASON, taking up 37.93%, 17.24% and 6.90%

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of the total, respectively. WAR metaphors are also omitted in TT (23.08% of the total).

Moreover, HUMAN metaphors are often newly created in TT, accounting for near a half of the total.

**Table 5.** Classifying framing strategies by source domains

Metaphor	M-M		M-O		O-M	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<i>War</i>	11	37.93	3	23.08	2	22.22
<i>Human</i>	5	17.24	1	7.69	4	44.44
<i>Season</i>	2	6.90	1	7.69	0	0.00
<i>Highway</i>	2	6.90	1	7.69	0	0.00
<i>Mechanics</i>	1	3.45	1	7.69	0	0.00
<i>Demon</i>	1	3.45	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Race</i>	1	3.45	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Aparted land</i>	1	3.45	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Sky</i>	1	3.45	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Weather</i>	1	3.45	2	15.38	0	0.00
<i>Hustle life</i>	1	3.45	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Corridor</i>	1	3.45	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Rebirth</i>	1	3.45	0	0.00	0	0.00
<i>Container</i>	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	11.11
<i>Fire</i>	0	0.00	1	7.69	0	0.00
<i>Net</i>	0	0.00	1	7.69	0	0.00
<i>physical entity</i>	0	0.00	1	7.69	0	0.00
<i>Competiton</i>	0	0.00	1	7.69	0	0.00
<i>gateway</i>	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	11.11
<i>Home</i>	0	0.00	0	0.00	1	11.11
<b>Total</b>	29	100.00	13	100.00	9	100.00

### Metaphor interpretation

In this section, how the images of Hubei are (re)constructed and (re)framed with monomodal verbal metaphors, monomodal visual metaphors and multimodal metaphors are explored. Specifically, the following details WAR and BRIDGE monomodal metaphors, as well as HAND and BACK multimodal metaphors.

### *Framing with monomodal verbal WAR metaphors*

WAR metaphors are used exclusively in verbal texts. In both VST and VTT, a heroic theme is conceptualized through the following metaphors: CORONAVIRUS IS WAR, PEOPLE ARE WAR HEROS, and GOVERNMENT IS WAR LEADER. These conceptual metaphors are mostly retained (M-M strategy), with some omitted (M-O strategy) or newly created in the TT (the O-M strategy). Table 6 summarizes the metaphorical expressions of WAR metaphors, illustrating how Hubei images are framed in contexts. ST expressions like “胜 shèng”, “战 zhàn”, “抗 kàng” and “战胜 zhàn shèng”, and TT expressions like “victory”, “battle”, “war” and “front line” frame Hubei as a critical battlefield of the Coronavirus war. ST expressions like “指挥 zhǐ huī”, “部署 bù shǔ” and “动员 dòng yuán”, and TT expressions like “command”, “direction” and “mobilize”, frame the Party-led Chinese government as a leader in the Coronavirus war. More importantly, ST expressions like “牺牲 xī shēng” and “英雄 yīng xióng”, and TT expressions like “fight”, “heroic” and “sacrifice”, frame Hubei people as war heroes and fighters.

**Table 6.** Hubei images in WAR metaphors

Metaphorical expressions in ST	Context (e.g.)	China image and Hubei image	Metaphorical expressions in TT	Context (e.g.)	China image and Hubei image
胜 shèng (victory)	武汉胜则湖北胜，湖北胜则全国胜	<i>Hubei is a critical battlefield.</i>	Victory	Victory in Wuhan ensures victory in Hubei and victory in Hubei ensures victory across the country.	<i>Hubei is a critical battlefield.</i>
战 zhàn (battle)	总体战阻击战全面打响；主动请战		battle	volunteered to join the battle against the virus	

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抗 kàng (fight against)	参与武汉 <b>抗疫</b> 的法国医生菲利普·克莱因；我们应当从武汉的 <b>抗疫</b> 实践中汲取成功经验		war	in an all-out people's war	
战胜 zhàn shèng (defeat)	<b>战胜</b> 新中国成立以来最大降雨量引发的汛情		front line	Philippe Klein, front line French doctor in Wuhan	
指挥 zhǐ huī (command)	习近平主席亲自 <b>指挥</b>		Command	under the personal command and direction of President Xi Jinping	
部署 bù shǔ (employment)	亲自 <b>部署</b>	<i>CPC leader (government) is war leader.</i>	direction	under the personal command and direction of President Xi Jinping	<i>CPC leader (government) is war leader.</i>
动员 dòng yuán (mobilize)	一场举国 <b>动员</b> 的人民 <b>战争</b>	<i>Chinese people are war fighters.</i>	Mobilize	the whole country was mobilized	<i>Chinese people are fighters.</i>
牺牲 xī shēng (sacrifice)	用 <b>牺牲</b> 和奉献	<i>Hubei people are heroes.</i>	Fight	76 days of shoulder to shoulder fighting for life over death	<i>Hubei people are war fighters.</i>
英雄 yīng xióng (war hero)	6100 万 <b>英雄</b> 的湖北人民		heroic	a heroic victory was achieved in all three battles; the 61 million heroic people of Hubei	<i>Hubei people are heroes.</i>
			Sacrifice	the 61 million heroic people of Hubei made great sacrifices	

The results show that these images are shared by ST and TT through M-M, M-O and O-M framing strategies. For example, “胜 shèng” and “victory” are equivalents, illustrating a M-M framing strategy. The term, “**抗疫 kàng yì**”, is momentarily omitted in the TT, and thereby the metaphor CORONAVIRUS IS WAR is sometimes omitted in the TT (the framing strategy of M-O). In the meantime, the metaphor PEOPLE ARE FIGHTERS is created in the TT through a O-M strategy.

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**Framing with monomodal visual BRIDGE metaphors**

The monomodal visual BRIDGE metaphors are used to frame Hubei in each of the pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic stages (See Table 7<sup>8</sup>). These pictures last one to two seconds in the video, without any verbal narration. In the pre-pandemic stage (image 1), Hubei’s bridge is jammed with cars, representing prosperity and vitality. Here, the metaphor “PROSPERITY IS JAMMED BRIDGE” is presented. In the pandemic stage, the bridge becomes empty (image 2) but is highlighted with lights (image 3 and 4). Here, the metaphors “BLEAKNESS IS EMPTY BRIDGE” and “HOPE IS LIGHT” are conveyed, which frames Hubei as a currently bleak yet hopeful place for the future. In the post-pandemic stage, the bridge becomes jammed again (image 5 and 6), but more importantly, it has three light belts that drive the province to further prosper (image 7).

**Table 7.** Analysis of BRIDGE metaphors

Image no.	BRIDGE image	Description	Metaphor	Stage
1		Many cars are crossing a <b>jammed</b> bridge.	<i>Prosperity is jammed bridge.</i>	Pre-pandemic
2		An ambulance is driving on an <b>empty</b> bridge	<i>Bleakness is empty bridge.</i>	pandemic
3		An <b>empty</b> bridge turns on <b>lights</b> and demonstrates four Chinese characters “湖北必胜”, (literally, Hubei must win.)	<i>Hope is empty bridge with lights on.</i>	

<sup>8</sup> All pictures used in Table 7 and 8 are taken by the authors of the study.

4		<p>An <b>empty</b> bridge turns on <b>lights</b>. <i>Hope is empty bridge with lights on.</i></p>	<p>Post-pandemic</p>
5		<p>Many cars are crossing a <b>jammed</b> bridge. <i>Prosperity is jammed bridge.</i></p>	
6		<p>Many cars are crossing a <b>jammed</b> bridge. <i>Prosperity is jammed bridge.</i></p>	
7		<p><b>Three light belts</b> are crossing the empty bridge. <i>Hope is empty bridge with lights on.</i></p>	

These BRIDGE metaphors help to narrate the Hubei virus-fighting story in a chronological order. Although DOOR and ROAD metaphors also reflect the changes in the pandemic and post-pandemic stages, they do not scope across all three stages of the pandemic. Thus, they are also not as typical as BRIDGE metaphors, which are evident in the pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic stages.

### *Framing with multimodal HAND and BACK metaphors*

Among the multimodal metaphors described above, HAND and BACK metaphors are highlighted, as they are predominantly used in the dataset (22.86% and 20%, respectively, see Table 4). Table 8 lists three HAND images and three BACK images, illustrating how these images are integrated with the verbal texts to express metaphorical meanings.

Three metaphors including “UNITY IS FIST”, “APPROVAL IS THUMBS-UP” and “ANONYMOUS HERO IS PEOPLE SHOWING THEIR BACK” are presented in

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Table 8. The consecutive image 1 and 2 are played at the place of the verbal narration “international friends and foreign students volunteered to join the battle against the virus”. Friends and students from other countries come to Hubei to help in the pandemic, representing a sense of unity. Fist in the history of communism symbolizes the solidarity and unity among the oppressed people<sup>9</sup>, which is mapped with the verbal narration. In this mapping, the Coronavirus pandemic creates victims of both Hubei Province and the rest of the world, yet in spite of the oppressiveness of the pandemic, the world unites together. In image 3, a recovered patient is giving a thumbs-up to the medical doctors. The verbal narration explains this expression as appreciation to the doctors who have saved his life. The mapping of “appreciation” in text and the thumbs-up image frames Hubei as a place of humanity.

Similarly, the video shows several BACK images (images 4-6) to represent the heroic people of Hubei Province, specifically highlighting the anonymous doctors, nurses, and civil workers. These anonymous heroes (people without showing their faces in the verbal text and BACK images in the pictorial shots) who have contributed to the fight according to their own skills, contributes again to the image of humanity arising in Hubei. The utmost meaning constructed through the three metaphors reveals the tenet of humanity, namely mutual help and sacrifice for the common good. The verbal translation from ST to TT, where verbal metaphors are constructed and translated, and the HAND and BACK images complement each other, completing the full image of Hubei.

**Table 8.** Analysis of HAND and BACK metaphors

Image no.	HAND/BACK image	Visual description	Verbal description	Metaphor
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<sup>9</sup> Refer to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raised\\_fist#cite\\_note-1](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Raised_fist#cite_note-1)

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1		<p>A group of Silk Road international volunteers are showing their <b>fists</b>.</p>	<p>ST: 在华外国友人和留学生主动“请战”。</p>	<p>Unity is fist.</p>
2		<p>A group of international students are showing their <b>fists</b>.</p>	<p>TT: International friends and foreign students volunteered to join the battle against the virus.</p>	
3		<p>A recovered patient is giving the doctors a <b>thumbs-up</b>.</p>	<p>ST: 你们把我从死人那里救回来, 所以我到现在这么健康。</p>	<p>Approval is thumbs-up.</p>
4		<p>A doctor is walking through the alley, showing his/her <b>back</b>.</p>	<p>ST: 6100万英雄的湖北人民用牺牲和奉献换回春暖花开山河无恙。</p>	
5		<p>A nurse is walking through the alley, showing his/her <b>back</b>.</p>	<p>TT: The 61 million heroic people of Hubei made great sacrifices that helped ensure a vibrant spring and safeguard the health of the whole nation.</p>	<p>Anonymous hero is people showing their back.</p>
6		<p>A civil worker is walking in snow, showing his/her <b>back</b>.</p>	<p>TT: The 61 million heroic people of Hubei made great sacrifices that helped ensure a vibrant spring and safeguard the health of the whole nation.</p>	

## Discussion

The above analyses have illustrated the Chinese government's intention of using verbal, visual and multimodal metaphors to frame Hubei province as a place of courage, prosperity, unity and humanity. Nonetheless, the adopted metaphors may receive

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unintended or even contrasting responses in the West. In the following, reasons for such a special arrangement of metaphors and their benefits and drawbacks will be elaborated in detail. Moreover, suggestions of metaphors for making the video more acceptable to audiences from different cultural backgrounds will also be provided.

### ***Benefits of metaphor usage in a Chinese culture***

According to Zabalbeascoa (2010) and Kruger (2018), multimodality is an exemplar of constrained communication where several modes are involved but the communication is semiotic rather than inter-semiotic. This complicates and layers the textures of meanings and potential miscommunications. Further constraints in communication also come from technology, financing, socio-cultural factors, attention span, sensory perception and the like (Zabalbeascoa 2010, 33). In the dataset, the various constraints include its modes (as verbal narration and visual demonstration are not always synchronous), the interaction of the interlocutors (as there is a lack of real-time interactive activity between the message sender and receiver) and the video duration (as the video played at the beginning of the special event should not last long). Hence, metaphors selected in the video are those that can best represent Hubei, and China in the pre-pandemic, pandemic and post-pandemic stages. The verbo-pictorial forms of presentation also stimulate the audience's multiple sensory systems and thereby influence their thinking (Forceville 2019).

To start with, the government employs TRANSPORTATION, ROAD, BRIDGE and CORRIDOR metaphors to showcase China's powerful infrastructure as representative of its economic growth, since it is highly dependent on this development (Sahoo, Dash and Nataraj 2010). Through the development of transportation lines, medical teams and supplies were efficiently transferred to Hubei during the pandemic so

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that Hubei could resume its business operations and interactions in a timely manner after the pandemic.

Moreover, China claims to adhere to the “people-oriented” principle, which means that the government governs the nation for its people<sup>10</sup> and adopts a top-down approach in decision-making. Hence, WAR metaphors are often used in documents such as the government’s annual work report to express the government’s determination to lead any struggles against issues such as poverty, poor education, and the pandemic. The predominantly used verbal WAR metaphors showcase the role of the Chinese government as a “WAR LEADER” giving commands and directives.

The video also uses HUMAN, HAND and BACK metaphors to present China’s traditional Confucian values such as benevolence, altruism and community benefits (Huang 2018). When Hubei is in danger at the height of the pandemic, doctors, nurses and logistical volunteers travel from all parts of China to contribute to the Hubei recovery. Importantly, this corroborates the significance of President Xi Jinping’s vision of building a community with shared future for mankind where unity and humanity are emphasized<sup>11</sup>.

### ***Drawbacks of metaphor usage for an international audience***

In a Chinese culture, the source text audience would identify national patriotism in the infrastructure-based economic strength, altruistic medical and logistics personnel, and resolute and well-organized government represented in the metaphors of TRANSPORTATION, ROAD, BRIDGE, CORRIDOR, WAR, HAND and BACK. Nevertheless, a more diversely cultural international audience (also the target of the video), may have contrasting responses to these metaphors.

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<sup>10</sup>[https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zwjg\\_665342/zwbd\\_665378/t990263.shtml](https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/t990263.shtml)

<sup>11</sup> Please refer to [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community\\_with\\_shared\\_future\\_for\\_mankind](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_with_shared_future_for_mankind)

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#### *WAR LEADER or FIREFIGHTER*

WAR metaphors in texts frame the Chinese government as a “WAR LEADER” and infrastructure-based TRANSPORTATION, ROAD, BRIDGE and CORRIDOR metaphors in pictorial shots highlight Hubei’s strengths at the national level. Hence, it is the government led by the Party that has been framed as the hero, not people who are inflicted or involved in the Coronavirus fight. This is possibly an over-emphasis of politics, or more specifically, the Party to the international audience.

The diversity of cultural expressions and political interpretations possible for an international audience might make this “LEADER-SUBORDINATE” relation less appropriate. Thus, the study proposes an alternative metaphor of “GOVERNMENT IS FIREFIGHTER”, since it symbolizes that both the government and the people are “heroes”<sup>12</sup> and they are treated as equals rather than “leader and subordinates”. Moreover, it also emphasizes brotherhood and collaboration between the government and the people in China, where civil servants and ordinary people make family sacrifices to put out this “fire” together. This suggestion of using “FIREFIGHTER” metaphor rather than “WAR LEADER” metaphor also finds support from Semino’s (2021, 50) study who argues that “FIRE” metaphors for COVID-19 “are particularly appropriate and versatile in communication about different aspects of the pandemic, including contagion and different public health measures aimed at reducing it”.

#### *Misrepresentation of people’s altruism into government’s egoism*

The multimodal HAND and BACK metaphors in the video are created to frame Hubei or China as a place of unity and humanity, highlighting the Confucian value of altruism. In

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<sup>12</sup> Although this promotional video also emphasizes the heroic Hubei people, metaphorical language in this regard is less used.

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these metaphors, medical workers and logistics personnel are accentuated to appraise the Chinese government's enrichment of the medical system. They were risking their lives and sacrificing their family time to contain the pandemic. Nonetheless, to the international audience, putting pandemic control before individuals might be an abomination. Beyond a recognition of the Chinese people's altruism, the target international audience may also view it as a representation of the Chinese government's egoism: sacrificing individuals' well-being so as to keep its safe and stable rule of the country. Although medical BACK metaphors could also be used to represent an accomplishment of the job, which is more in line with the ST expressions, they might relate to a sense of loss and loneliness where medical workers were fighting on their own, weakening the initial intention of the promotional video.

The study proposes that more emphases should be put on individuals who were brought through the pandemic. This might be achieved through more related verbal, visual and multimodal metaphors to illustrate the virus-fight experience from a bottom-top perspective. For instance, more HAND metaphors can be used to show individuals' appreciation, sympathy and unity. Interview segments can be added in the video to give victims, medical workers and volunteers a chance to tell their stories. Relevant metaphors arisen from these pictures and interviews may better explain how China practices its "people-centered" principle.

## **Conclusion**

The study adopts a toolkit approach to study the translation of multimodal metaphors in the 10-minute promotional video of Hubei Province on social media platforms in the post-pandemic era. Corpus tools have been used to identify metaphor, framing analysis to identify metaphor framing strategies and CDA to describe, interpret and explain the metaphor data. The results show that monomodal verbal metaphors, monomodal visual

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metaphors and multimodal metaphors complement each other to frame Hubei as a heroic, prosperous and hopeful province that values unity and humanity.

The metaphors are mostly retained or created rather than omitted, with more or less the same source domains in the ST and TT to narrate the Hubei story in the virus fight. Visual images are directly transferred to the target audience but complement the verbal descriptions. The selection of different modes and source domains of metaphors can be attributed to the nature of constrained communication and various socio-cultural factors.

The study has also discussed the pros and cons of metaphor usage in the video and proposed the use of the alternative FIREFIGHTER, rather than WAR metaphor, since the former emphasizes the individual and collaborative work of both the government and the people (on an equal footing) confronting a “pandemic fire”, whereas the latter displays a “LEADER-SUBORDINATE” relation between the government and its people, which can be misinterpreted as an ignorance of the people’s sacrifice and an over-emphasis on the politics, or the Party’s leadership in the “pandemic war”. The contributions are multifold. In the first place, it transpires that metaphor is an important frame for meaning-making, and metaphor selection in translation can be a valuable method of reframing, which further supports Entman’s (1991) argument. In the second place, it exemplifies the study of multimodality in the contemporary media age, where verbal and visual metaphors are commonly compressed into short video formats to express rich frames and meanings. Nonetheless, the study only conducts a case study based on one video, thereby making the generalizability of the results rather restricted. Future studies can build on this through larger corpora across media types such as verbo-pictorial tweets, Instagram posts and streaming media. One semiotic resource that was not explored here was how the music choices interwove with verbal and visual elements in the video. Finally, various themes in politics, cultures, economics and science might be the focus of the (re)framing

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power of multimodal metaphor translation, thus better unraveling the mechanisms underlying meaning (re)construction and image (re)building.

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