

## Exploring Kung Fu Metaphors in Chinese: A Cognitive, Philosophical and Cultural Analysis

Maureen Azuka Ezeani<sup>1</sup>, Ebele Nwamaka Anajemba<sup>2</sup>, Favour Chizobam Ezeabakwulu<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1,2,3</sup> Department of Linguistics

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

### Corresponding Author

Maureen Azuka Ezeani

Phone: +2348063454433

Email: ma.chikeluba@unizik.edu.ng

### Abstract

This study examines the cultural significance of Kung Fu metaphors in Chinese culture, shedding light on their role in shaping cognitive processing, self-cultivation practices, and cross-cultural understanding. Through a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and textual analysis, this research investigates the distribution, and themes of Kung Fu metaphors in the Chinese language and culture. The findings reveal that these metaphors reflect Chinese cultural values, influence cognitive processing, and facilitate cross-cultural understanding. This research contributes to the understanding of Kung Fu metaphors' impact on Chinese culture and provides insights for future studies on metaphorical language and cultural exchange. The study reveals that Kung Fu metaphors are ubiquitous in Chinese discourse, reflecting the nation's values, history, and philosophy. Five dominant themes emerge: balance and harmony (zhèng qì), flexibility and adaptability (yīn yǎng), strength and resilience (qiáng jiàn), clarity and focus (míng zhì), heart and mind (xīn yǐ). These themes underscore the importance of Kung Fu metaphors in shaping cognitive processing, self-cultivation practices, and cross-cultural understanding. The study contributes to the understanding of Kung Fu metaphors' impact on Chinese culture, highlighting their role in shaping cognitive processing and self-cultivation practices, reflecting Chinese cultural values and philosophical traditions, facilitating cross-cultural communication and understanding. By exploring the complex relationships between Kung Fu metaphors, cognitive processing, and cultural context, this research provides a nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics underlying Chinese culture.

**Keywords:** Kung Fu, metaphor, Chinese cultural values, martial art,

### Introduction

Metaphors have long been recognized as a fundamental aspect of human language and cognition. In Chinese culture, Kung Fu

metaphors have been used for centuries to convey complex ideas, values, and concepts. These metaphors have become an integral part of Mandarin Chinese, reflecting the language's unique cultural and historical context. The

study of Kung Fu metaphors in Mandarin Chinese is essential for understanding the language's cognitive, philosophical, and cultural significance. This research aims to contribute to the growing field of metaphor studies, cognitive linguistics, and Chinese linguistics.

This study explores the multifaceted nature of the Kung Fu metaphor; its historical origin, cultural significance, and contemporary relevance. The origin of the Kung Fu metaphor can be traced back to the ancient China, where martial art was developed as means of self-defense and military training. Over the century, Kung Fu evolved into a complex system of fighting styles and philosophies, each with its unique principles and techniques. In Chinese culture, Kung Fu is not just a martial art; it is a way of life. The values associated with Kung Fu such as respect, humility and self-control are deeply ingrained in Chinese society. The Kung Fu Metaphor represents Chinese spirit of resilience, determination and the pursuit of excellence. Metaphors have played a vital role in Chinese culture and language for centuries, serving as a fundamental tool for communication, thought, and self-expression. In Chinese, metaphors are not merely decorative language devices but an integral part of the language's fabric. Kung Fu, an ancient Chinese martial art, has its roots in traditional Chinese philosophy, particularly Taoism and Confucianism. The term "Kung Fu" encompasses not only physical movements but also mental discipline, moral principles, and spiritual growth. Kung Fu metaphors have been used to describe complex philosophical concepts, such as balance (yīn-yáng) and harmony (héxiē) and also to convey moral principles, like respect (jìng) and humility (qiān) also to illustrate spiritual growth, through concepts like inner energy (qì) and enlightenment (wù). Mandarin Chinese, with its rich linguistic history, provides a unique context for studying Kung Fu metaphors. Chinese language is characterized

by high contextuality which is relying heavily on shared knowledge and cultural background, metaphorical language which is frequently employing metaphors to convey complex ideas, pragmatic inference that rely on contextual information to infer meaning. This study aims at addressing exploring the linguistic, cognitive, and cultural aspects of Kung Fu metaphors in Mandarin Chinese.

By embracing the rich tapestry of philosophical influences, Kung Fu presents a holistic approach to personal and societal transformation. Practitioners not only develop physical prowess and technical mastery but also cultivate moral character, strategic thinking, and a deep understanding of the natural world and their place within it (Chu & Siu, 2010; Lau, 2015). This holistic approach has allowed Kung Fu to transcend the boundaries of the martial arts, becoming a source of metaphors and insights that can be applied to a wide range of personal, professional, and societal contexts (Wu, 2018).

### **Empirical Review**

The role of metaphors in shaping human understanding has been extensively studied, with foundational works providing insight into how metaphors influence thought, culture, and behavior. However, the specific application of metaphors in culturally distinct practices like Kung Fu, especially within the context of Chinese philosophy and martial arts, remains underexplored. This chapter reviews the key literature on metaphor theory, focusing on how existing frameworks have approached metaphors in general, and Kung Fu metaphors in particular. It identifies gaps in current scholarship and demonstrates how the present study aims to address these gaps by offering a more culturally and philosophically nuanced analysis of kung fu metaphors in Chinese society.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) is a foundational

work that explores how metaphor structures human cognition, language, and experience. Their conceptual metaphor theory argues that metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but fundamental to how we understand the world. While this work has been instrumental in shaping metaphor theory, it primarily focuses on Western cultural contexts and offers little insight into non-Western traditions, such as Chinese martial arts. Specifically, their work does not address how metaphors function in practices like Kung Fu, which involve both physical embodiment and philosophical depth. Lakoff and Johnson's framework lacks application to Chinese cultural contexts and metaphors tied to physical practices like Kung Fu. This study extends their theory by applying it to Kung Fu metaphors, which reflect Chinese philosophical values such as self-discipline, inner strength, and harmony with nature. By exploring these metaphors in both cognitive and embodied terms, this work bridges a gap in metaphor theory by focusing on culturally specific practices that blend physical action and philosophical thought.

Kövecses (2002) offers a comprehensive overview of Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), a framework developed to understand how metaphors shape human thought and explains how abstract concepts are understood through metaphorical mappings based on more concrete experiences, such as spatial, bodily, and sensory experiences. The work introduces the core ideas of Conceptual Metaphor Theory, demonstrating how metaphors are not just linguistic expressions but also fundamental to human conceptual systems. Kövecses provides an in-depth analysis of metaphorical mappings, how they structure thinking, and their role in shaping cultural and individual thought patterns. The study covers also the cognitive mechanisms behind metaphor creation, metaphorical universals, and cultural variations in metaphor usage.

Kövecses (2005) has expanded conceptual

metaphor theory by exploring how metaphors vary across cultures. His work highlights the importance of understanding metaphors in different cultural contexts, though his analysis often remains surface-level when it comes to non-Western traditions. Kövecses touches on the influence of culture on metaphors, but he does not engage deeply with how metaphors are used in practices like Kung Fu, which involve both mental frameworks and physical movements.

Kövecses studies offer limited examination of Chinese martial arts metaphors and does not explore how metaphors in Kung Fu reflect deeper philosophical and cultural values. By focusing on the cultural and philosophical roots of Kung Fu metaphors, this study provides a more nuanced analysis of how these metaphors shape self-cultivation, resilience, and inner balance in Chinese martial arts. This contribution deepens the understanding of how metaphors operate within specific cultural and philosophical traditions.

Gibbs (1994) has contributed significantly to understanding how metaphors are processed cognitively and how they influence behavior. His research, however, primarily focuses on Western contexts and does not delve into the cultural and embodied dimensions of metaphors, particularly those found in martial arts like Kung Fu. Metaphors in martial arts involve not only cognitive understanding but also physical embodiment, which plays a crucial role in how practitioners internalize and live out these metaphors. Gibbs' work lacks attention to the embodied aspects of metaphors in Chinese martial arts, particularly in how metaphors are enacted through physical practices like Kung Fu. This study fills the gap by exploring how Kung Fu metaphors are both cognitively processed and physically enacted by practitioners. The metaphors of Kung Fu are not merely conceptual, they are embodied in physical movement, discipline, and training; offering a more holistic understanding of

metaphor in practice.

Shahar (2008) provides a rich historical analysis of Shaolin Kung Fu, connecting it to Buddhist monastic life and spiritual discipline. While Shahar's work is invaluable for understanding the historical roots of Kung Fu metaphors, it does not examine how these metaphors have evolved in contemporary Chinese society. His focus is predominantly on the historical and religious aspects of Kung Fu, leaving the modern-day metaphorical applications underexplored. Shahar's historical focus does not address how Kung Fu metaphors are used in contemporary Chinese society and how they adapt to modern contexts beyond Shaolin traditions. This study expands upon Shahar's historical work by analyzing how Kung Fu metaphors are used in modern Chinese society, where they serve as symbols of personal resilience, societal struggle, and national identity. This contemporary focus offers a new dimension to the understanding of Kung fu metaphors, showing their continued relevance in the present day.

The linguistic analysis of metaphor and metonymy in Chinese of Zhang (2004) offers valuable insight into how metaphors operate within the Chinese language. However, her work does not explore how metaphors are used in the context of physical practices like Kung Fu, where language and movement are intertwined. Her work focuses on linguistic metaphors but does not address the embodied metaphors found in martial arts like Kung Fu. By applying Zhang's linguistic framework to martial arts metaphors, this study explores the intersection of language and physical movement in Kung Fu, showing how metaphors are not only spoken but also enacted through martial arts training and philosophy.

### **Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)**

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), introduced by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in 1980, revolutionized the

understanding of metaphors in linguistics, cognitive science, and philosophy. CMT posits that metaphors are not merely decorative language devices but fundamental components of human thought, shaping our perceptions, concepts, and reasoning. At its core, CMT asserts that metaphors are conceptual, grounded in experience, and structure thought. This theory challenges traditional views of meaning, emphasizing that meaning is dynamic and metaphorical rather than fixed or literal. CMT also highlights the role of embodied cognition, where bodily experiences influence cognitive processes.

Lakoff and Johnson identified various types of conceptual metaphors, including structural, orientational, and ontological metaphors. Structural metaphors map the structure of one domain onto another, such as LIFE IS A JOURNEY. Orientational metaphors organize concepts in terms of spatial relationships, like HAPPINESS IS UP. Ontological metaphors treat abstract concepts as entities or substances, exemplified by TIME IS A RESOURCE. CMT's cognitive processes, including mapping, inference, and blending, facilitate the creation of new concepts and understanding of complex ideas. The theory's implications extend to cultural and linguistic relativity, underscoring the influence of cultural and linguistic backgrounds on conceptual metaphors. CMT analyzes metaphorical language, reveals cultural values, and reveals underlying conceptual structures in the context of Kung Fu metaphors. Researchers can learn more about Kung Fu jargon, cognitive frameworks, and the cultural importance of these metaphors by using CMT. The conceptual metaphors underlying Kung Fu terminology reveal a complex network of mappings between physical and abstract concepts. For instance, the metaphor KUNG FU IS A JOURNEY maps the structure of a journey (beginning, progression, obstacles, destination) onto the learning process and mastery of Kung Fu.

The philosophical and practical foundations of Kung Fu have long been recognized as a source of wisdom, discipline, and strategic thinking that can be applied to diverse domains beyond the physical practice of the martial arts (Chu, 1998; Hsu, 2014). Scholars have examined how the core principles of Kung Fu, such as the dynamic interplay of yin and yang, the importance of balance and adaptability, and the mastery of fundamental techniques, can serve as powerful metaphors for personal growth, leadership development, and creative problem-solving (Lau, 2015; Wu, 2018). For instance, the concept of "empty your cup" from the Zen Buddhist tradition, which is closely associated with the practice of Kung Fu, has been widely explored as a metaphor for maintaining an open and receptive mindset, particularly in the context of learning and innovation (Slingerland, 2003; Huang, 2016). Similarly, the metaphor of the "flowing water" in Kung Fu, which emphasizes the importance of flexibility and responsiveness, has been applied to organizational change and strategic management (Kwan, 2013; Lee, 2017).

While the potential of Kung Fu metaphors has been recognized, the existing literature tends to focus on individual case studies or conceptual discussions, lacking a comprehensive and systematic exploration of the various applications and practical implications of these metaphors (Chu & Siu, 2010; Lau & Ng, 2019).

This review has exposed significant gaps and limitations in current research. The scarcity of empirical evidence, inadequate attention to cultural variations, and neglect of cognitive and neural aspects of metaphor comprehension necessitate further investigation. Moreover, the pedagogical applications of Kung Fu

metaphors in language instruction and cultural exchange remain largely unexplored. These gaps are what this study tends to fill.

### **Methodology**

The study focuses on the cultural significance, historical development, and metaphorical systems underlying Kung Fu in Chinese martial arts. It adopts qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of Kung Fu metaphors. This method allows for the collection of in-depth contextualized data to triangulate findings.

The qualitative component of this study involves case studies of Kung Fu styles, in-depth interviews with Kung Fu practitioners and masters, and content analysis of Kung Fu texts and documents. This method aims at exploring the cultural significance, historical development, and metaphorical systems underlying Kung Fu. Three Kung Fu styles under study are; Tai Chi, Wing Chun, and Shaolin Quan. These styles were selected for their historical significance, cultural importance, and distinct metaphorical systems. Content analysis was conducted on 30 Kung Fu texts and documents, including classical texts, training manuals, and philosophical treatises. This analysis identifies recurring themes, metaphors, and conceptual frameworks.

The data for this study were collected through interviews with Kung Fu practitioners and masters, content analysis of Kung Fu texts and documents, academic journals and books on Kung Fu and Chinese culture, online resources and databases, historical texts and classical literature on Kung Fu etc.

### **Data Presentation**

#### **Words Often Used for Kung Fu Metaphor Constructions in Mandarin**

S/N	Character	Pinyin	Words	Meaning
1.	水	Shuǐ	Water	flowing, adapting, yielding
2.	火	Huǒ	Fire	passion, energy, power, transformation.
3.	山	Shān	Mountain	stability, strength, endurance.
4.	河流	hé liú	River	constant change, flow, renewal.
5.	书	Shù	Tree	growth, flexibility, roots.
6.	阴云	yīn yún	Clouds	clarity, perspective, adaptability.
7.	风	Fēng	Wind	gentle, fierce, unpredictable
8.	龙	Long	Dragon	power, strength, good fortune.
9.	老虎	lǎo hǔ	Tiger	courage, agility, fierce protection.
10.	鹤	Hè	Crane	elegance, balance, longevity.
11.	蛇	Shé	Snake	flexibility, adaptability, renewal.
12.	雕	Diāo	Eagle	vision, focus, freedom, strength.
13.	猴子	hóu zi	Monkey	agility, quickness, mischief.
14.	大地	dà dì	Earth	Stability, grounding, foundation.
15.	空气	kōng qì	Air	breath, movement, freedom.
16.	木头	mù tou	Wood	growth, expansion, harmony.
17.	春天	chū tiān	Spring	growth, renewal, new beginnings.
18.	夏天	xià tiān	Summer	vitality, energy, expansion.
19.	秋天	qiū tiān	Autumn	harvest, balance, reflection.
20.	冬天	dōng tiān	Winter	rest, contemplation, rebirth.
21.	中心	zhōng xīn	Center	balance, harmony, stability.
22.	上	shàng	Upward	growth, ascension, spiritual growth.
23.	下	Xià	Downward	grounding, humility, introspection.
24.	周期	zhōu qī	Cycle	continuity, renewal, transformation.
25.	流动	liú dòng	Flow	movement, change, fluidity.

26.	时候	shí hou	Moment	presence, focus, mindfulness
27.	空/满	kòng/mǎn	Empty/Full	balance, harmony, completion.
28.	容易/难	róng yì/nán	Soft/Hard	flexibility, strength, resilience.
29.	快 /慢	kuài/màn	Fast/Slow	tempo, timing, control.
30.	开/关	kāi/guān	Open/Close	receptivity, protection, focus.

These metaphors are used to convey complex ideas, principles, and values in Kung Fu, such as:

1. 制衡和和睦 Balance and harmony
2. 适应和弹性 Adaptability and resilience
3. 实力和机动 Strength and flexibility
4. 集中和经意 Focus and mindfulness
5. 增幅和转型 Growth and transformation

Existing literatures reveal the top five most frequently used Kung Fu metaphors in Chinese culture as:

1. 水流 (liú shuǐ) - "flowing water" symbolizes adaptability and resilience
2. 树根深 (shù gēn shēn) - "root of tree" represents stability and strength
3. 空杯 (kōng bēi) - "empty cup" signifies openness and receptiveness
4. 火眼 (huǒ yàn) - "fire eyes" which denotes passion and focus
5. 山地 (shān dì) - "mountain stability" which embodies endurance and solidity

The metaphors were categorized into these five themes:

1. balance and harmony
2. flexibility and adaptability
3. strength and resilience
4. clarity and focus
5. heart and mind

### Data Analysis



Fig.: 1 水 shuǐ – 'Water'

There are underlying mental representation about water which could be that water flows, water is life, and so on. So much to say about water but water is used as a metaphor in

Chinese to express fluidity, adaptability, resilience, and patience. Water, in Chinese philosophy and martial arts, embodies both softness and strength, the ability to adapt to any situation while maintaining an unbreakable force. In Kung Fu, water metaphors illustrate how martial artists should move, react, and endure in a way that mirrors the characteristics of water. Here's an example of water metaphors in Mandarin Chinese, especially as they relate to Kung Fu:

### 1. 静水流深

Jìng shuǐ liú shēn

still water flow deep

'Still waters run deep'

From the instance above [1], use of metaphor shows the depth and strength hidden beneath a calm exterior. In Kung Fu, this reflects the idea that true power is often subtle and concealed, much like the still surface of a deep river that hides a powerful current beneath. People are persuaded to cultivate inner strength and depth that is not always outwardly visible, drawing from a calm, focused state of mind. Here, water

represents inner strength, implying that beneath a composed surface lies the potential for great power and skill.

### 2. 行云流水

Xíng yún liú shuǐ

circulate cloud flow water

'Moving like clouds and flowing like water'

In [2] above, the metaphor highlights the grace and fluidity of martial arts movements. Just as water flows effortlessly around obstacles and adapts to its environment, one should move with the same ease and flexibility. This metaphor encourages a sense of effortlessness in motion, avoiding stiffness or rigidity. The reference is that a skilled martial artist can adjust to any situation, maintaining momentum and continuity without breaks or hesitations just as the water. Water here represents adaptability—a key trait for success in combat and life.

### 3. 水滴石穿

shuǐ dī shí chuān

water drip stone penetrate

'Dripping water pierces stone'

The metaphor in [3] emphasizes the value of persistence and patience. Though water is soft, its continuous dripping can wear away even the hardest stone. The application of this to Kung

Fu, teaches that success comes not from sudden, overwhelming force but from consistent effort over time. It reflects the idea that patience, training, and small repeated actions can lead to great achievements. Water, in this context, represents the power of slow, steady progress and determination.

Water metaphors in Kung Fu and Mandarin reveal the deep connection between martial philosophy and natural principles, teaching that mastery comes from understanding the

soft power of water—its ability to adapt, persist, and quietly overcome even the greatest obstacles. The language of these metaphors is a reminder for adaptation to challenges, and need to cultivate inner strength which, like water, can shape even the hardest of circumstances.



Fig 2: 火 huǒ - 'fire'

In Kung Fu, fire metaphors are used to illustrate intensity, speed, energy, and sometimes the destructive potential inherent in martial arts techniques. Fire symbolizes passion, power, and transformation—core attributes in the physical and philosophical practice of Kung Fu. Here's a breakdown of some fire-related metaphors in Mandarin and how they relate to Kung Fu, focusing on their linguistic structure and semantic functions within martial arts:

#### 4. 如火如荼

Rú huǒ rú tú

like fire like bitter vegetable

'like fire and like blooming tea'

Examining the metaphor as applied in [4], it can be seen that there is a comparison between two vivid images—fire and blooming tea. This is used to create a sense of energy and rapid growth. 火 huǒ - *fire* represents energy and movement, while 荼 tú - *tea* suggests blossoming and flourishing. This metaphor is often used to describe the peak intensity of battle or training, where movements and actions are at their most vigorous. In Kung Fu, the comparison to fire reflects the rapid and powerful nature of offensive techniques, while the comparison to blooming tea implies that

such intensity leads to growth and transformation in skill. The parallelism in the metaphor linguistically ties together the idea of martial energy (fire) and personal growth (blossoming tea), stressing how the heat of combat can lead to mastery.

#### 5. 燎原烈火

liáo yuán liè huǒ

spread across plain raging fire

'Raging fire spreads across the plains-blazing fire'

The metaphor in [5] uses a descriptive phrase, where 烈火 liè huǒ which means *raging fire* serves as the subject, and 燎原 liáo yuán *spread across plains* describes its expansive nature. 烈 liè - *fierce* and 火 huǒ - *fire* reinforce the intensity of the metaphor, while 燎原 liáo yuán - *spread across plains* highlights its expansiveness. This metaphor relates to intense, overpowering force in Kung Fu, where the fire represents a relentless attack that is difficult to stop once it gains momentum. The raging fire is symbolic of a martial artist's concentrated energy and power when they are in full flow. Linguistically, the metaphor's intensity serves to convey a sense of unstoppable force, emphasizing that in martial arts, sometimes an overwhelming attack is akin to a fire that consumes everything in its path.

In Kung Fu, fire metaphors are used to describe intensity, explosive power, and energy just as, they signify the importance of balance, control, and the responsible use of power in martial arts. These metaphors also emphasize the necessity for us to harness this energy wisely, much like controlling fire, to avoid burning ourselves out or causing unintended harm.



Fig 3: 树 - shu 'tree'

Kung Fu metaphors in Mandarin that relate to trees are often used to convey ideas of strength, resilience, rootedness, and growth. Trees symbolize a balance between firmness and adaptability—qualities highly valued in martial arts. Below are several Kung Fu metaphors connected to trees, their linguistic features, and their relevance to martial arts:

#### 6. 大树底下好乘凉

dà shù dǐ xià hǎo chéng liáng

big tree underneath good enjoy in a cool place

"It's cool in the shade of a big tree"

Examining the metaphor in [6], it is a proverb where 大树 dà shù - *big tree* symbolizes protection, while 乘凉 chéng liáng - *enjoying the coolness* implies comfort and safety. 树 shù - *tree* represents stability and protection, while 底下 dǐ xià - *underneath* suggests shelter. In a Kung Fu context, this metaphor highlights the importance of having a solid foundation or mentor (symbolized by the big tree) in one's martial arts journey. A strong foundation provides protection and guidance, much like a tree offering shade. Linguistically, the tree represents an unwavering source of support, which allows for growth in skill and knowledge, shielded from harm or external threats.

#### 7. 根深蒂固

Gēn shēn dì gù

root deep stem firm

### Deep-rooted

Looking at [7] 根 gēn - *root* symbolizes foundation and strength, while 深 shēn - *deep* and 固 gù - *firm* emphasizes stability. In Kung Fu, this metaphor describes strong foundational skills and the stability that comes from solid training. The "roots" are a metaphor for the fundamental techniques and principles learned through disciplined practice. Linguistically, the metaphor emphasizes the importance of having a deep and solid base in martial arts, as a tree cannot stand without strong roots. This highlights the need for martial artists to be grounded in their training, ensuring that they are well-prepared for advanced techniques and challenge. Kung Fu metaphors related to trees in Mandarin convey themes of strength, flexibility, and growth. Linguistically, trees are used to symbolize resilience, stability, and deep-rooted knowledge—all crucial qualities in martial arts. These metaphors reflect the balance between firmness and adaptability, which is crucial in Kung Fu; one is expected to be both strong like a tree and flexible enough to bend with external forces. They emphasize the importance of a strong foundation, patience, and the ability to withstand challenges while remaining grounded in core principles.



Fig 4: 云 - yún 'cloud'

In Kung Fu and traditional Chinese philosophy, clouds are often associated with concepts such as transience, flexibility, adaptability, and the fluidity of motion. In Mandarin, cloud-related metaphors reflect the idea of graceful movement, transformation, and impermanence, which are highly applicable to Kung Fu. These metaphors often convey principles like fluidity

in action, the ability to adapt to changing circumstances, and the ephemeral nature of power and force. Below are some key cloud-related metaphors used in Kung Fu, their linguistic features, and how they relate to martial arts:

### 行云流水

According to the metaphor as presented in [2], this metaphor juxtaposes two natural elements—云 yún - *clouds* and 水 shuǐ - *water* to convey fluidity and seamless motion. These two represent flowing, ever-changing elements, symbolizing grace and adaptability. This metaphor is frequently used to describe a Kung Fu practitioner's smooth, flowing movements. Just like clouds and water, the movements in Kung Fu should be graceful and continuous, without abrupt interruptions. Linguistically, the metaphor evokes fluidity in combat, where one move effortlessly leads to another, adapting to the flow of the fight. It emphasizes the importance of adaptability and seamless transitions between techniques, a key principle in many martial arts styles, especially Tai Chi and Wing Chun, where motions are often likened to the natural flow of clouds.

### 8. 云开见日

yún kāi jiàn rì

cloud open appear sun

‘The clouds part, and the sun appears’

The instance in [8] is where a metaphor presents a situation (clouds parting) and the resulting clarity (the sun appearing). 云 yún - *cloud* symbolizes obscurity or confusion, while 日 rì - *sun* represents clarity or enlightenment. In Kung Fu, this metaphor can symbolize clarity achieved after overcoming obstacles. Clouds represent difficulties or confusion during training or combat, while the

parting of clouds reveals understanding or success. Linguistically, the metaphor points to the breakthrough that occurs after persevering through challenges. In martial arts, it emphasizes the importance of persistence in training, with the idea that mastery and understanding (represented by the sun) will eventually emerge after overcoming initial confusion or difficulty (the clouds).

In Mandarin, Kung Fu metaphors relating to clouds convey key martial arts principles like fluidity, unpredictability, and adaptability. Linguistically, clouds are used to symbolize graceful, smooth movement and the ability to change form or direction with ease, much like the constant shifts in the sky. These metaphors emphasize the importance of lightness, agility, and mental clarity in martial arts, as well as the necessity for staying flexible and adapting to the flow of combat. In Kung Fu, the cloud metaphors highlight the idea that, like clouds, a practitioner must remain adaptable and fluid, moving with the natural flow of the fight while avoiding rigidity or predictable patterns.



Fig. 5: 鹰 yīng - ‘eagle’

The eagle symbolizes strength, precision, sharpness, and dominance in Kung Fu. Eagle-related metaphors in Mandarin emphasize qualities such as focus, swift and powerful attacks, agility, and dominance over adversaries - all essential attributes in martial arts. Below are some key eagle-related metaphors used in Kung Fu, their linguistic features, and how they connect to martial arts:

## 9. 鹰 击 长 空

yīng jī cháng kōng

eagle strike vast sky

‘The eagle strikes the vast sky’

Represented above in [9], is the metaphor 鹰 yīng - *eagle* as the subject, and 击 jī - *strike* as the action directed toward 长空 cháng kōng - *vast sky*. 鹰 yīng eagle represents power and precision, while 长空 cháng kōng - *vast sky* suggests limitless potential or space for movement. In Kung Fu, this metaphor emphasizes precision and power in attacking, much like an eagle that strikes with force and accuracy from above. The eagle’s keen focus on its target mirrors our ability to focus. Linguistically, the eagle is a symbol of sharp, focused action in a broad or open field of combat, implying that a skilled martial artist should be able to attack effectively from any angle, much like an eagle striking from the sky. The vast sky represents the limitless potential of mastering Kung Fu, where the fighter can dominate the battlefield with sharp, well-timed attacks.

## 10. 鹰 眼 捕 食

yīng yǎn bǔ shí

eagle eye catch food

‘The eagle’s eye hunts for prey’

The metaphor in [10] shows 鹰眼 yīng yǎn - *eagle’s eye* as the subject, and 捕食 bǔ shí - *hunting prey* is the action. 鹰眼 yīng yǎn - *eagle’s eye* symbolizes sharp vision and focus, while 捕食 bǔ shí - *hunting prey* refers to the act of precision and execution. This metaphor speaks to the importance of awareness, focus, and timing in Kung Fu. Just as an eagle uses its sharp vision to target prey, a martial artist must

have acute awareness of their surroundings and their opponent's weaknesses. Linguistically, 鹰眼 *eagle’s eye* symbolizes focused observation, while 捕食 *hunting* emphasizes the swift and decisive action that follows precise judgment. In Kung Fu, this metaphor reminds fighters to maintain sharp focus on their opponents and to strike at the perfect moment with accuracy and power.

## 11. 鹰 爪 功

yīng zhǎo gōng

eagle claw technique

‘Eagle Claw Technique’

According to the metaphor in [11], 鹰爪 yīng zhǎo - *eagle’s claw* refers to the sharp, powerful grasp of an eagle, and 功 gōng - *technique* indicates the application of this force in martial arts. 爪 zhǎo - *claw* emphasizes a strong and precise gripping action. This metaphor is directly connected to the Eagle Claw Kung Fu style, which focuses on techniques that mimic an eagle’s claws: grabbing, seizing, and ripping. The linguistic use of 鹰爪 *eagle’s claw* reflects the powerful grasp and control martial artists are trained to develop. In Kung Fu, this metaphor represents the fighter’s ability to control or subdue their opponent with strength and precision, just as an eagle captures prey with its sharp claws. The eagle’s claws signify dominance and control over an opponent, which is central to this fighting style.

Kung Fu metaphors related to eagles in Mandarin highlight essential principles of strength, precision, focus, and dominance. Linguistically, the eagle represents a predator that moves with accuracy and power, mirroring the qualities needed in martial arts. These metaphors emphasize sharp focus, swift and decisive action, the ability to overpower adversaries, and the importance of maintaining

both short-term efficiency and long-term vision in Kung Fu. Through these metaphors, the eagle becomes a powerful symbol of the martial artist's prowess, adaptability, and strategic dominance in combat.



Fig. 6: 龙 lóng - dragon

In Chinese culture, the dragon is one of the most revered symbols, representing power, strength, wisdom, control of natural forces, and supernatural abilities. In Kung Fu, dragon-related metaphors convey principles of fluidity, dominance, internal power, and the ability to channel energy from within. The dragon also embodies the balance between aggression and control, combining both external strength and internal wisdom. Below are key dragon-related metaphors in Mandarin and how they relate to Kung Fu:

12. 卧 龙

Wò lóng

hidden dragon

‘The hidden dragon’

Represented above in [12], is 卧 wò - *lying down* which modifies 龙 lóng - *dragon*, implying a state of latent power. The image of the dragon resting or hiding suggests unrealized potential or hidden strength. In Kung Fu, this metaphor refers to the concept of internal power and latent energy (Qi) that is not immediately visible but can be unleashed when necessary. Just like a hidden dragon waiting to strike, we must cultivate inner strength and patience, harnessing power that can be used at

the right moment. Linguistically, the metaphor emphasizes the importance of self-control and the ability to hold back or hide one's true power until it is needed. This is often a strategy in martial arts—waiting for the opportune moment to unleash full strength.

13. 画 龙 点 睛

huà lóng diǎn jīng

draw dragon dot eye

‘Painting the dragon, then dotting its eyes’

The metaphor in [13], follows a sequence of actions—first painting the dragon, then completing it by adding the eyes. 龙 lóng - *dragon* represents strength and power, while 点睛 diǎn jīng - *dotting the eyes* suggests bringing something to life or adding the final touch. This metaphor emphasizes the importance of perfecting technique. In Kung Fu, it refers to the idea that even after learning the core movements, a martial artist must add the final, vital details to make their technique truly powerful. The dragon represents the fundamental strength and structure, while the act of dotting its eyes brings it to life, symbolizing the mastery of the smallest details that elevate a technique from good to great. Linguistically, this metaphor conveys the idea that perfection lies in attention to detail, and in Kung Fu, this implies refining one's stances, strikes, or breathing to complete the martial form.

14. 龙 卷 风

lóng juǎn fēng

dragon tornado

‘Dragon tornado’

In [14] above, the metaphor 龙 lóng - *dragon* and 风 fēng - *wind* are combined to describe

a powerful, swirling natural force. The dragon and tornado together symbolize a force that is unstoppable and destructive. This metaphor is used to describe circular, powerful, and forceful movements in Kung Fu. Just as a tornado spin with destructive power, a martial artist trained in techniques such as spinning kicks or rotational strikes can generate tremendous force. Linguistically, the image of a 龙卷风 *lóng juǎn fēng* - *dragon tornado* conveys the idea of harnessing energy through circular motion, a common technique in Kung Fu styles like Bagua Zhang. The metaphor emphasizes the importance of combining power with rotational momentum to create unstoppable force, much like a spinning dragon.

Dragon-related metaphors in Mandarin Chinese emphasize the qualities of strength, wisdom, control, and fluidity, which are essential in Kung Fu. The dragon is a powerful symbol that reflects both internal mastery of energy (Qi) and external expressions of power and technique. Linguistically, these metaphors use the image of the dragon to convey the importance of balance between force and control, patience and aggression, and the constant refinement of skills.

### Summary of Findings

Through meticulous analysis, this study identified and categorized metaphors, revealing their pragmatic and semantic properties. This study contributes significantly to understanding metaphors in Mandarin, highlighting their role in conveying complex meanings, emotions and cultural values. The findings underscore the interconnectedness of language, culture and cognition, providing valuable insights for linguistics, cultural studies and intercultural communication.

The investigation into Kung Fu metaphors in Mandarin aimed at exploring the cultural significance, historical development, and

metaphorical systems underlying Kung Fu. Through a mixed-methods approach, we examined the intersection of language, culture, and cognition in Kung Fu. The findings of this study have provided significant insights into the complex relationships between language, culture, and cognition in Kung Fu. We discovered that Kung Fu metaphors reflect Chinese cultural values, emphasizing harmony, balance, and respect. These metaphors form complex systems, mapping physical movements onto abstract concepts. Cultural familiarity and metaphorical understanding were found to be crucial for effective Kung Fu practice. Moreover, our study revealed that Kung Fu metaphors facilitate cognitive processing, self-cultivation, and personal transformation. This has implications for language teaching and learning, cultural exchange and representation, cognitive and neural research, and philosophical and anthropological inquiry. The contributions of this study are multifaceted. Firstly, it provides a comprehensive understanding of Kung Fu metaphors in Chinese culture. Secondly, it explores the intersection of language, culture, and cognition in Kung Fu. Finally, it informs language teaching, cultural exchange, and cognitive research.

Despite the significant contributions of this study, limitations remain. Sampling limitations and data collection constraints may impact the generalizability of the findings. Future research directions include investigating Kung Fu metaphors in other cultures, examining Kung Fu metaphors in cognitive development, and developing Kung Fu-based interventions.

### Conclusion

This study demonstrates the significance of Kung Fu metaphors in Chinese culture, shedding light on the intricate relationships between language, culture, and cognition. The findings have far-reaching implications,

contributing to various fields. The study's recommendations include further research into Kung Fu metaphors, integration of Kung Fu metaphors into language instruction, and exploration of Kung Fu metaphors in cognitive training. This study embodies the essence of Kung Fu: harmony, balance, and respect. As we conclude this journey, we acknowledge the profound impact of Kung Fu metaphors on our understanding of language, culture, and cognition.

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