**Framing an Ultimate War via Political Terminology:**

**How Thucydides Trap gains its power**

**Abstract**

“Thucydides Trap” as a political terminology originated from a short newspaper commentary, to an academic buzzword, ending up referred publicly by the President of China. It was empowered with increasing significance and elevating political context. The widespread and heated discussion of “Thucydides Trap” is attributed by many to big power confrontation, whereas the intrinsic linguistic feature and the framing process of which should not be neglected. At this moment when U.S.-China relation has reached the “freezing point” after Covid-19, this research provides a reflection on the general “emergence-proliferation-acceptance” process of this term for policy-makers, academia (Web of Science, Baidu Scholars) and media (New York Times, Wall Street Journal; People’s Daily, Global Times) in Chinese and English context. This study argues that (a) “Thucydides Trap” was framed to gain strong political implications and high political context, that (b) analogy and metaphor techniques used in the framing process entitled the term with great language efficacy in both domestic and cross-cultural communication and (c) this framing and acceptance process constructs a narrative and atmosphere of inevitable armed-conflicts under realism paradigm, overlooking the catastrophic nature of the war, lacking principal care of peace and security of human society.

**Keywords**

U.S-China Relations; Thucydides Trap; Framing; Political Terminology; Metaphor and Analogy; Rhetoric; Narration; Language Efficacy; Strategic Communication

**Introduction**

Thucydides Trap, as a terminology possessing implications on U.S.-China relations, gained its name after a Financial Times article warning the U.S of falling into a “trap” aggregated upon the Pacific Ocean. During the subsequent debate conducted by researchers and practitioners from both sides, the relationship between U.S. and China was depicted to have an historical parallel in the conflict between Athens and Sparta. While this term originated from a short newspaper commentary, to an academic buzzword, end up mentioned publicly by the President of China, it has been empowered with increasing significance.

The outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic has been witnessing an exacerbated “freefall” of U.S.-China bilateral relations, where the anticipated cooperation-competition symbiosis has been eclipsed by vis-à-vis confrontation and tit-for-tat retaliation. The “decoupling” between these two major powers to this day has put the world in a tense and worrisome atmosphere pondering about the possibility of dispute escalation or even an ultimate war, which was to some extent foretold by a popular expression in the past few years, the “Thucydides Trap”. (Smith & Fallon 2020; Hatuel-Radoshitzky et al. 2020; Wyne 2020)

When Graham Allison first depicted the Pacific as an inevitable battlefield for U.S and China because of two variables “rise and fear”, in his *Financial Times* article “*Thucydides’s trap has been sprung in the Pacific*”, his bold naming and predicting stirred discussion. In opinion article and his subsequent book “*Destined for war: America, China and Thucydides’s Trap*”, Allison (2017) argued that the rise of China has put America into fear and pressure, which in turn serves as rationale and stimuli for the America’s strategic change and diversion, resembling a historical apparel between the superpower and rising power, Athens and Sparta, who end up in the Peloponnesian War (B.C. 431–404). Allison (2018) adds supplementary remarks that in a Thucydides Trap, there is highly possible a war to be commenced between the “Rising Power” and “Established Power” whereas there also exits several exceptions in history.

While before any Sino-America armed conflict commences, the theoretical assumption or prediction by “Thucydides Trap” cannot be empirically tested as it stands. Barring the endurance and reliability of the theory itself, questions should be raised upon the process how this terminology has been accepted by researchers, practitioners and the press, especially when it was transmitted from U.S. to China, where it became a prevailing issue heating up widespread discussion for both the elites and the public. And the fact that Chinese scholarship and media initially accepted this terminology with limited hesitation, criticism and qualification, generating plentiful interpretation circling which has therefore inevitably pictured a negative future of U.S.-China bilateral relations. (Chen, 2018; Qian, 2018; Ren, 2018) The de facto rising nationalism in Chinese society alongside with a more uncompromising and assertive foreign policy by the Chinese government are simultaneously reflecting the social atmosphere of “self-defense” and “preparing for war”. (Bhattacharya, 2017; Helle, 2017)

Despite the unprecedented influence it projected both intentionally and unintentionally on Chinese academia, politics and even the public, few exhaustive researches have been done to focus on the framing and diffusion process of “Thucydides Trap” as a political terminology.

Based on the data set overviewing related publications in English (Web of Science) and Chinese (Baidu Scholars) academia and articles on representative Chinese (People’s Daily, Global Times) and U.S. media (Wall Street Journal, New York Times), this article provides an empirical reflection on how this terminology was accepted, crossing-culturally communicated and elevated. To depict the rationale of *framing-acceptance-communication*, this article analyzes the intrinsic linguistic features (Metaphor and Analogy) lying in the term that facilitated its communication power. As conclusion, this research points out the lack of general humanitarian care in the making of a prevailing political terminology, implying and even provoking potential armed-conflicts whereas circumventing emphasizing the destructive nature of it.

**Theoretical Formation of Thucydides Trap**

Previous to the theoretical assumptions presented by Allison in 2012, the representativeness and symbolism of the Peloponnesian War has aroused attention of the academia for a relatively long period of time. The conflicts between ancient Athens and Sparta was categorized into a systematic contradiction. (Welch, 2003) The theory of “hegemonic war” also emerged from Thucydides’ narration of the Peloponnesian War. Some international relations researchers put that Thucydides in fact implies a discernible and recurrent course of a hegemonic war. (Gilpin, 1988)

Learning from Athens and Sparta, it is concluded that a hegemonic war, in which regional and global hegemonies may cause fundamental power transition, originating from an initial phase of a stable international system dominated by a hegemonic power; and when a subordinate “runner-up” power begins to rise, posing threat to the predominant hierarchical structure, conflicts will arise between the hegemony and the rising power. Gilpin (1988) also argues that a bipolarization system will be formed by both sides allying-up to face the option of a pre-emptive war. Thus, a zero-sum bipolarized system will be constructed, considered to be anarchical and unstable, where a tiny touch has the possibility to trigger a crisis and precipitate an ultimate war. The resolution of the war will determine a new hegemony and the world will enter a new stage of hierarchical ecosystem. (Gilpin, 1988)

Before the end of the Cold War and the rise of China in the 21st century, the theory of “hegemonic war” was mainly utilized to regularize the empirical puzzles of Europe after the crushing defeat of Spanish “Invincible Armanda”, from when no land-maritime rising power successfully replaced the predominating hegemon, most of which failed and lost the disproportionate development potential it had witnessed before the conflict. (Kristof, 1993) For example, the First World War, where Third Reich end up with “Treaty of Versailles” and piles of scrap iron which used to be the Imperial Navy’s submarine U-boats manufactured and deployed to compete with the hegemonic British Empire at first place.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, China is regarded as the only country possessing attribute of a systemic rising power. (Yan, 1995) As a researcher- practitioner, Shirk (2008) was the first to put Thucydides’ historical narrative in correlation to the de facto China-U.S. relations.

*“In the continuity of the Thucydides thesis, that history has produced evidence in support of the tendency for rising powers to cause war.” (Susan L. Shirk, “China: The fragile superpower”)*

From 2011, the subtle connection between status quo on the Pacific and the antiquity war took place on the Aegean started to arouse attention. At the beginning of 2011, when global economy index showed that China’s annual GDP has overpassed Japan in 2010, making China the No.2 largest economy of the world, second only to America. A systematical rise became undeniable and inevitable as expounded articles and comments filled with concerns. China and America, became the modern duplicated version of Athens and Sparta. (Schott, 2011)

In May 2012, General Martin Dempsey, then chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, mentioned Thucydides in a speech, in which he is optimistic about avoiding the “Trap”. (Helle, 2017) From when Chinese mainstream media started to mention and discuss about this term in reports and stories concerning China-America relations. They easily adopted and adapted this word into their narratives, as if it had been an existing scene on the Pacific. “How to avoid Thucydides Trap?” became the topic discussed by scholars and media commentators. (Global Times, 2016)

When Chinese President Xi Jinping officially visited the U.S. in 2015, barely 4 years after “Thucydides Trap” was created, he mentioned this term in one speech delivered at Washington State:

*"There is no such thing as a 'Thucydides’s trap' in the world, but with repeated strategic miscalculations between the major powers, it is possible that they will create a 'Thucydides’s trap' for themselves.” (President Xi, visiting U.S.A, September 2015)*

“Thucydides Trap” reached the level of international discussion, from theory to practice, from academia to politics, gaining high political context as emphasized by the authority and decision-making level officers of both nations.

**Publications and Media Articles about Thucydides Trap**

Throughout the past decade, Thucydides Trap was adopted by academia and the press from both sides, the U.S. and China. A general analysis of related academic publications retrieved from Web of Science and Baidu Scholar shows that scholars across the world possess fervent attention on this topic, especially in recent years.

Figure 1 shows the number of academic publications about the ‘Thucydides Trap’ written in Chinese and English. The search results of Baidu Scholar, a widely used academic tool in China’, provides the data shown in the left, while Web of Science offers the data for the right. Both results are obtained by searching ‘Thucydides Trap’. Due to differences in search mechanisms, the numbers in the two graphs are not comparable, but the tendencies are the same: studies about the ‘Thucydides Trap’ have been rising since 2012, and may have reached their peak in around 2019.

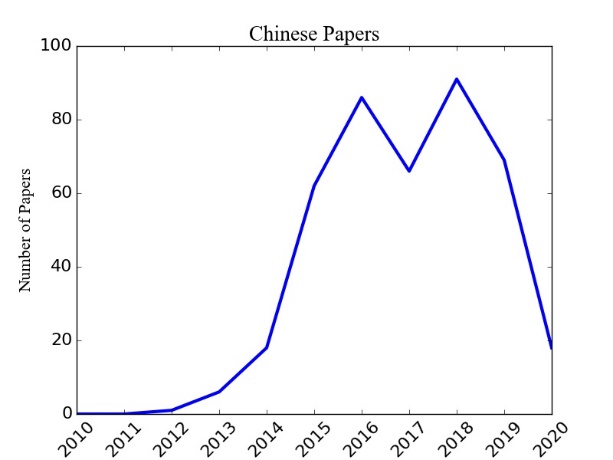
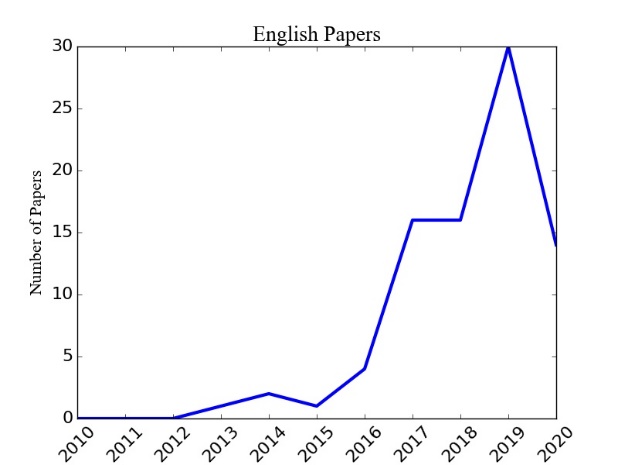
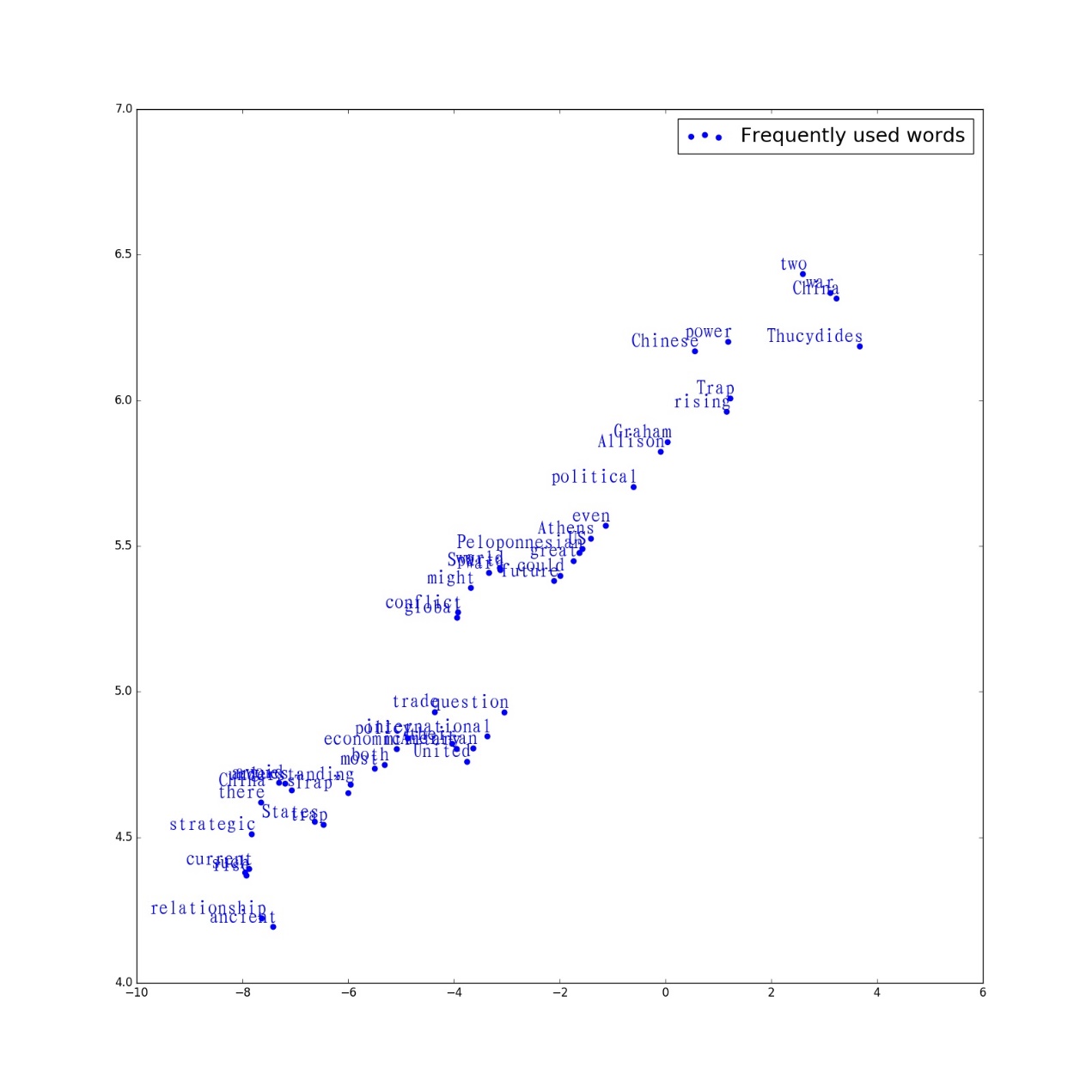
 

Figure 1. Number of academic publications about the ‘Thucydides Trap’

To provide an intuitive perception of these papers, we search ‘Thucydides Trap’ on Google Scholar and select the top 50 papers shown. We calculate the frequencies of words for their abstracts. After removing stop words, the frequencies are shown in Table. 1. Words like ‘war’ and ‘power’ occupy primary positions. Also, word vectors for frequently used words are obtained through the word2vec algorithm. Their dimensions are originally 200, and are reduced to 2 with t-SNE algorithm. The word vectors are provided in Figure 2. The closer the words, the more usually they are used in the same context. Thus, word vectors can help understand topics in the discourse. For example, it can be found at the bottom-left part of the figure that some abstracts tend to talk about trade and economics, while some focus more on history (at the center of the figure).

*Table 1. Frequently used words in abstracts (used more than 20 times in the 50 papers’ abstracts)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Words | Frequencies |
| 'war' | 103 |
| 'China' | 102 |
| 'Thucydides' | 101 |
| 'power' | 82 |
| 'Trap' | 47 |
| 'rising' | 37 |
| 'US' | 34 |
| 'relation' | 32 |
| 'United' | 31 |
| 'States' | 29 |
| 'two' | 29 |
| 'Chinese' | 25 |
| 'both' | 21 |
| 'economic' | 21 |
| 'Athens' | 21 |
| 'Allison' | 21 |
| 'country' | 20 |



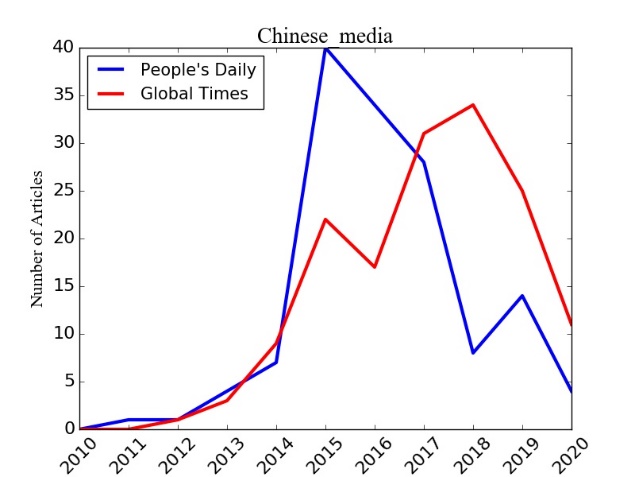
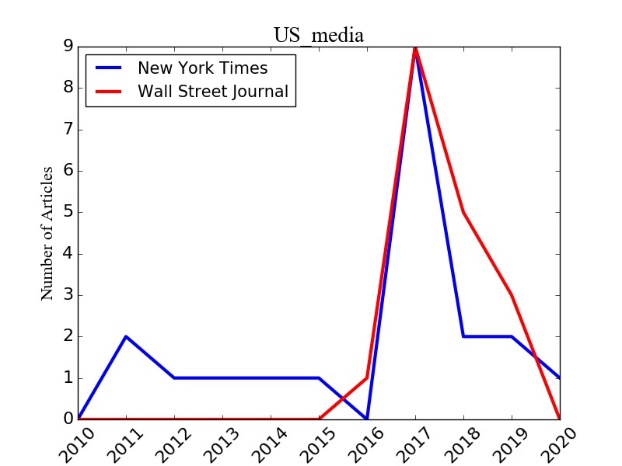
*Figure 2. word vectors for frequently used words*

Table 2 shows the countries of the authors’ institution. It can be found that scholars in China and the US are highly concerned about the topic, and researchers in Asia-Pacific countries, e.g., Japan, Republic of Korea, Australia, also contribute a lot.

*Table 2. Institutes of which country wrote the most papers about the ‘Thucydides Trap’?*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Country of the author’s institution | Number of publications from the country |
| China | 15 |
| The United States | 15 |
| Japan | 5 |
| The United Kingdom | 4 |
| Australia | 2 |
| Republic of Korea | 2 |
| Singapore | 2 |
| Brazil | 1 |
| Canada | 1 |
| Greece | 1 |
| Italy | 1 |
| Russia | 1 |

How media report the ‘Thucydides Trap’ is also essential for understanding the word’s influence. We collected all the coverages about ‘Thucydides Trap’ by two major Chinese newspapers, People’s Daily and Global Times, and two major US newspapers, New York Times and Wall Street Journal, between 2010 and 2020. Figure 3 shows the number of relevant articles on these media. For Chinese media, the word ‘Thucydides Trap’ was frequently mentioned from 2014 to 2019, while for American media, the coverages were much less, and most reports were published in 2017.

*Figure 3. Number of media coverages about the ‘Thucydides Trap’*

Different media tend to use different words when mentioning ‘Thucydides Trap’. Table 3 shows the frequently used words in the four newspaper’s titles when reporting the ‘Thucydides Trap’. People’s Daily used a lot of ‘cooperation’ and ‘new’ while New York Times and the Wall Street Journal cared more about Xi Jinping, the Chinese president.

*Table 3. Frequently used words in the title of reports on ‘Thucydides Trap’*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| People’s Daily | | Global Times | | New York Times | | Wall Street Journal | |
| Words | Times | Words | Times | Words | Times | Words | Times |
| 新 (new) | 39 | 美 (U.S,) | 61 | Book | 4 | China | 10 |
| 中国 (China) | 31 | 中China) | 54 | Xi | 2 | News | 2 |
| 中 (China) | 30 | 中国 (China) | 40 | Obama | 2 | Collision | 2 |
| 美 (U,S.) | 26 | 美国 (U.S.) | 23 | Dambisa | 2 | Xi | 2 |
| 关系 (relation) | 24 | 关系(relation) | 22 | Letters | 2 | Jinping | 2 |
| 合作 (cooperation) | 19 | 陷阱 (trap) | 21 | China | 2 | Emperor | 2 |
| 大国 (great power) | 18 | 不 (not) | 18 | Superpower | 1 | review | 2 |
| 钟声 (name of an author) | 16 | 新 (new) | 12 | Chinese | 1 | U.S.-China | 2 |
| 陷阱 (trap) | 15 | 接收 (accept) | 11 | U.S.-China | 1 | Behold | 2 |
| 世界 (world) | 15 | 战略 (strategy) | 11 | Threatening | 1 | World | 2 |

**Framing Process**

Having inspired generations of scholars’ endeavors toward a formation mechanism of the systematical warfare, Greek historian and military general Thucydides, the author of *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, is proved to have left no exact expression of a “Thucydides Trap” in his book. While the scenario of a regional conflict happened more than 2,400 years ago between Athens and Sparta has been constructed to be an ancient warning and *horrible dictum* in the 2010s, the endeavors of the academia and media theorizing and framing it is to be attributed to.

Framing theory, before gaining its multi-disciplinary orientations, originally introduced by Bateson in 1955, and characterized by his 1972 work as “*the physical analogy of the picture frame and the more abstract…analogy of the mathematical set*”. Framing is a way of persuasion, in Bateson’s view, based on culture and nature cognition. When a statement or opinion is posed, the content attached before or after the argument can be seen as a manifest message. Therefore, what information to be covered in the message, what structure and order the information is organized and how to tell the story, are all called “framing”. (Cornelissen et al. 2011) In this perspective, framing is bridging the opinion and language of the speaker with the culture and cognition of the audience.

Gamson & Modigliani (1989) put forward a broad definition of "framing", that is a core idea or narrative with the function of organizing the overall content, providing the fundamental meaning for all events, establishing links between different elements. To simplify, “framing” in this definition is the "controversial content" and "the essence of the problem" in the general narrative. According to Tankard (2001), the media framing is to organize the central idea of news discourse, which provides context by selecting, emphasizing, excluding and expounding, and thus illustrate the core agenda.

Entman (1993) elucidated that framing in the media is constructed by the appearance some certain words and the absence of some other specific words. According to De Vreese (2005), framing is also the selective emphasis on different aspects of a specific event. To select some information and to omit some is the basic function of “framing” process, making some certain traits of an event or individual “salient” while others not.

Moreover, in communication field, framing theory is also described as “a way to describe the power of a communicating text” (Entman, 1993) To frame is to describe the reality for the audience to perceive. The aspects of the reality are selected, and the words are carefully edited en route for a specific purpose of communicators. Framing, thus contains different *definition of the problems, interpretation of the causality, evaluation of morality and recommendation of treatment*. (Matthes, 2012)

Framing theory are widely applied to media studies. The framing is regarded as a part of journalists and editors’ daily work, where journalists adapt frames from the others and at the same time create their own frames. The manifest in news content can be journalistic frames and the media outlets as a whole frame political issues, influencing public opinions which in the end having impact on policy-making process. (Matthes & Kohring, 2008)

For an overall analysis of the terminology “Thucydides Trap”, to look into the framing procedures of it is crucial and fundamental. Both culture cognition paradigm and communication paradigm are adopted in this study, since the term itself originated from a revision to ancient history, possessing implications on bilateral relations, geopolitical issues, power transition and global system, and at the same time gaining power through three processes of cross-cultural communication. (See Figure 1)

The first process of cross-cultural communication (See Figure 1, Process 1), was from the ancient Greek narration to modern American international relations field. To understand the situation depicted by Thucydides and adapt it into a modern narrative requires framing. The second process, as mentioned above, was from America to China.

When “Thucydides’s Trap” starts from the debate among American researchers and practitioners, setting the agenda for Chinese media and academia, and ends up mentioned in a negative phrase by the Chinese President, it has no doubt aroused attention in both cultures, in which process, framing also took effect.

One more process that is easily ignored by the western observers lies in the cross-cultural communication from Greek historiography to contemporary China’s context. The way Chinese society looks into ancient Aegean culture should be considered as a factor that influences the framing process as a whole. Farther away from the western culture circle shared by America and many European countries, rooted in the ancient civilization of Greece and Rome.

*Figure 1. Historical, political and cross-cultural features of Thucydides’s Trap*

Thucydides’s Trap

History: Athens and Sparta

Politics: China and America

Process 1

Process 2

Process 3

The analysis structure built for this study is composed of three levels: 1) the ancient war; 2) the theory system; 3) the China-U.S. relations.

In each level, the framing contains three factors: a) the selected information; b) the intentionally omitted information; c) the supplementary manifest information.

First taking Allison’s 2012 article “Thucydides’s trap has been sprung in the Pacific” (Allison, 2012) which marked the debate around this concept as a case, this structure is to demonstrate how “Thucydides Trap” was originally framed.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Messages  Levels | Information Selected | Information Omitted | Manifest Information | Framed Features |
| Level 1:  the war | **Athens:** dramatic rise; centre of civilization.  **Sparta**: shocked; fear.  **War:** Sparta’s respond compelled by fear. | **Athens:** Democracy; Loose city states; Care more about business than force.  **Sparta:** Authoritarian; Concentrated Power; Care more about force than business.  **War:** between maritime power and land power; neighboring countries( very close). | *Thucydides said……“It was the rise of Athens and the fear that this inspired in Sparta that made war inevitable.”* | Caused by rise and Fear;  Inevitable. |
| Level 2:  the theory | **Rising power** disturb the established power system, causing fear of **the hegemon**, end in war. | **The attributes and wills** of the rising power and established power.  **The side** that started the war, could also be the rising power. | *Think about Germany …… In 1914 and in 1939, its aggression and the UK’s response produced world wars.* | Rising power: threat and challenge.  Established power: starts a war. |
| Level 3:  the relation | **China:** NO.2 in GDP; increasingly aggressive posture towards sea territory issues.  **U.S.:** Hegemony from 1890; Uncomfortable. | **The gap** between two countries in comprehensive national strength;  **The cost** and willingness for each side to start a war.  **The geopolitical distance** and attributes of two nations.  **The overall world system** and collective security restriction. | *The rapid emergence of any new power disturbs the status quo. In the 21st century……“a diva of such proportions cannot enter the stage without effect”.* | The Thucydides’s trap is happening between China and America.  A war between them is possible and predictable, and undoubtedly, disastrous. |

*Table 1. The framing structure of “Thucydides’s Trap”.*

As indicated in the framing structure shown in *Table 1*, three features were emphasized out of other actors:

* **Similarity**: how the China-U.S. relation nowadays apparel to the ancient Athens-Sparta.
* **Danger & Risk:** how the rise of China will change the overall world system and how dangerous it is for U.S. to be in this trap.
* **Credibility & Predictability:** how the other countries in 1500 years’ history proved this trap, how believable and reliable this trap is.

Empirical tests need to be done in order to provide more evidence on whether these three factors enhance people’s rational and emotional recognition of the concept. While according to Galtung and Ruge (1965), when a story is easy to understand, close to people’s life, trustable, it gains more attention. As the value of news is determined by 12 elements including intensity, ambiguity and significance, cultural proximity, relevance, predictability, mentioning elite nations, elite people and reference to negative information.

In addition, the basic interest of a nation is thought to be security interest, of which the most predominant yet profound actor is “survival”. (e.g. Fearon, 1995; Graham, 2008.) An ultimate hegemony war, resembling what is been narrated in Greek history, proved to be accurate predication for 15 centuries, which will destroy more than half of the earth, undoubtedly, is a remarkable and absorbing “story”.

While in the framing process, it is the fully-utilizing of rhetoric skills that augment the term’s linguistic capacity to be tempting and at the same time intimidating. The concept “Thucydides Trap” itself is constructed by a narrative of metaphors and analogies, essentially equipped with strong language efficacy.

**Analogy & Metaphor**

In both formal and informal communication, metaphor and analogy are commonly used as a rhetoric tool to assist the understanding and perceiving of some specific ideas or facts, facilitating communication and comprehension. (Armstrong et al. ,2018)

Metaphor is a rhetoric method making comparison between unrelated concepts, which may share less attributive similarity but with some common characteristics. The comparative narration always take place in solid physical reality, based on unspecific and abstract concepts. Metaphors in language instruct the listeners’ understanding of the information from the speaker, and at the same time reflect and imply the recognition and way of perceiving information of the speaker. (Masson, 2001)

Metaphor has its vitality and vigor in different languages. In Chinese history there was a poetess living in the Eastern Jing Dynasty, who was daughter of the grand councilor, wife to the general. A widely known tale of this lady is a “metaphor competition” with her brother. In a snowy day, her brother romantically and boldly made his poet that “the snow is just like sprinkling salt into our sky”. While she disagreed, chanting that “the snow is more like willows’ flowers blown up by wind”. Snow as the same physical reality, as called *Noumenon,* was matched with different comparison concepts, *Metaphor*, in the two poets’ separate description and narration.

What can be inferred from the “metaphor competition” is that, the siblings had discrete recognition of the reality. The man saw the snow more glittering and translucent in granular structure, while the lady perceived it softer, lighter in an irregular shape and motion, signifying a coming spring full of hope.

In English, “Raining cats and dogs” was an example of common metaphors. In Korean, “Filling potatoes in stomach” means having something to say but cannot find a proper time. From these simple examples, it can be found that different languages may have cross-cultural hinders when using metaphors. (Nielsen et al., 2009; Lü et al., 2017)

Analogy, is another common rhetoric tactic. Similar to metaphors, analogies draw comparisons between two objects, while analogy things with similar features of two domains.(Armstrong et al., 2018)

Metaphor has its *Noumenon(N)* and *Metaphor(M)*, as discussed above, N is the physical reality and M is some concept used to compare and depict.

Analogy has their Analog Concept(A) and Target Concept(T). A is used to describe and assist the understanding of some features about T. A and T can both be people, plants or nations, the objects of analogy are not limited. However, when a nation is described as a flower, then it is a metaphor; when it is acting like a country in history, then it should be considered as analogy.

For the term “Thucydides’s Trap”, both metaphor and analogy are applied in the framing and narration. (See *Figure 2*.)

**Topic:** The U.S.-China relation today.

**Metaphor**

**Analogy**

***Noumenon:***

The status quo and bilateral relation of two countries.

***Metaphor:***

A trap.

***Target Concept:***

China and America.

***Analog***

***Concept:***

Athens-Sparta;

Germany-Britain.

***Metaphor Features:***

Dangerous;

Risky;

Invisible.

***Analogy***

***Features:***

Rising power and dominating power;

Ending with war.

*Figure 2. Metaphor and Analogy in “Thucydides’s Trap”*

Information provided by metaphor and analogy alone are not sufficient nor complete. In the framing process, metaphor and analogy may highlight some of the features while ignore some others. A metaphor or analogy tends to neglect some dissimilar factors to make the statement more persuasive. (Osenga, 2013)

The metaphor and analogy in the terminology and narration of “Thucydides’s Trap” (See *Figure 2*.) sheds different lights on the efficacy of language. Metaphor in this context frames the relations between two countries to be dangerous and risky, while the danger and risk can be invisible, forming a warning to the listener. Analogy, however, takes other countries in history as analogs, strengthening the credibility of this concept.

**Framing an Ultimate War**

Metaphor and analogy as communication skills, have been widely adopted into policy education (e.g. Osenga, 2013), environmental communication (e.g. Armstrong, 2018), organizational strategic communication (e.g. Cornelissen, Holt & Zundel, 2011) and many other studies. Researchers with multidisciplinary backgrounds were aware of the significant connection between framing and rhetoric skills.

Cornelissen et al. (2011) put that the extent to which analogy and metaphor in framing works depends two factors: the cultural familiarity to listeners; the connectiveness with the original motivations of the listeners. Adapting the cultural motivational factors, connecting with the prior findings, hypothesis can be made that through the framing of “Thucydides Trap”, the culture familiarity and motivation differs in two countries may also be counted as a reason why this concept stirred heated discussion in the States domestically and communicated to the globe crossing three processes (See *Figure 1*.), crossing-culturally.

The recognition to the immediate and potential environment is based on culture values and motivations towards future. In international relations studies, when making estimation of the environment one sovereignty is confronted with, three main factors were taken into consideration in the change of strategic culture, thus the perception of an imminent strategic environment. (Pirani, 2014; Libben, 2017)

* **Nature of Conflict**: Inevitable or Abnormal phenomenon?
* **Nature of Enemy**: Zero-Sum or Not Zero-Sum?
* **Effect or Force**: Strong or Weak?

Via the application of analogy and metaphor in framing the “Thucydides War”, it can be concluded that the selective features that are displayed on three levels of the frames, and the features emphasized by analogy and metaphor tells the audience that: The Thucydides Trap is possessing an inevitable, zero-sum, strong enemy in the strategy environment.

While the motivation of both sides to keep security and development, the rhetoric is great likely to be empowered with high efficacy, projecting powerful influence on political environment. For the divergent cultural backgrounds of two countries, when Greek history has closer connection with American contemporary society, and China has less cultural familiarity, it is still remained to be study that whether the mysterious or other features in the framing process of Chinese to Ancient Greece affect the understanding and perceiving of the terminology.

**Conclusion**

Thucydides Trap is a political terminology derived from historical context while narratively framed by contemporary scholarship. Previously, profuse theorization endeavors were made by researchers, digging into the formation mechanism of major armed conflicts, hegemony war and land-maritime power transition. It is in recent years, that the “Thucydides Trap” became a “dark horse”, stirring attention in both countries, elevated onto a relatively high political context, comparing to other political terminologies. Through this study, three main findings may be qualified to explain part of the reasons.

Thucydides’s Trap

Historiographical Narrative

Contemporary Adaptation

Metaphor

Analogy

Framing the Strategy Environment

*Figure 3. The overall framing process*

**First**, the term itself, in a linguistic perspective of communication studies, is formed with analogy and metaphor. The metaphor of a “trap” is literally presented, while the analogy of “the Peloponnesian War” lies in the narration on a slightly deep layer to which explanation is needed. **Second**, the framing by Allison and other scholars, also by the media who took the term as granted, ignoring the potential negative effects it may arouse, from three levels, constructed a predictable, inevitable and ultimate war. **Last**, the strategy environment is framed by brick and brick of these terms implying political issues. The original motivation for both sides to avoid a catastrophic war, maintain security and pace of development, in turn enhances the ability and willingness to accept the rhetoric narrative and be framed.

The overall theoretical framing process and de facto terminology proliferation picture during the last decade revisited in this research leads to an assertation that the social emotions and perception of imminent strategic environment may pose more willing acceptance to some provocative terms such as “Thucydides Trap”. Especially when the transmission crossed actual border of country, culture and languages. How and why the Chinese researchers and practitioners adopt this concept without adequate criticism nor reasoning process when first confronted with which is possibly lied in the intrinsic communicative power this term has in politics. While this framing and communication process in turn poses negative expectation for the society towards U.S.-China relations, augmenting the already surging nationalism and assertive policy atmosphere.

Care for human society’s peace and security is thus not paid commensurate attention to in this process, providing surfeit rationale and stimuli for discussions of “inevitable war” while circumventing or overlooking the destructive or even catastrophic nature of the ultimate war that has been narrated. To communicate conflict is an easier approach to fascinate the public, for it is weighs higher on news value, communicative power and strategic culture, whereas the fundamental mission of humanitarian and social sciences research, the solicitude for human society deserves more endeavors. War is narrated based on the realist paradigm where national power and national interest stands as merits for every single judgment, while during the process of communication, political terminology at all times influence the society’s collective memory therefore collective decision-making. Lives are lost in wars, so do civilization and humanitarian cares. Although in theoretical discussion especially International Relations sphere, humanitarian issues are ostensibly trivial to the overall paradigm, while possessing unprecedented social influence, the academia, the press and the policy-makers may not be able to neglect their responsibility for communicating care via research, discussion and presentation.

This study is a bold trial to bridge communication studies, linguistic and rhetoric studies with international relations field. More empirical researches need to be done to support the basic hypothesis of this essay, when the findings now are limited but filled with potentials and inspirations.

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