Visual Metaphor in Literary Covers: A Case Study of Symbolic Expression in Lu Xun's *Call to Arms* Cover

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ABSTRACT

While symbolic metaphor is pivotal in conveying narratives and emotions in literary book covers, research on visual metaphors remains limited. This study addressed the gap by examining the cover of Lu Xun's 1926 Call to Arms as a case study to explore how visual metaphors convey implicit meanings and authorial emotions within the book content. This analysis adopted Wilcox's (2004) metonymic and metaphorical mapping model to analyse the symbolic elements on Lu Xun's cover. The findings indicated that the cover layout represented the "iron house" restricting the national spirit; the typography "呐喊" embodied the New Youth warriors calling for the national awakening from sleep through their literary works; the colour black signified the dark social reality, while the red conveyed both the pain of revolution, as well as the desire for a bright future. This paper also employed a conceptual integration network to blend the three metaphorical meanings to construct a cohesive interpretation, a visual manifesto of Lu Xun's inner world for revolution. In summary, this study provides a practical analytical framework for interpreting the meanings of literary book covers, laying the groundwork for further studies.

Keywords: visual metaphor, literary cover, symbolic expression, Lu Xun, Call to Arms

INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognised that the initial impression of a book is shaped by its cover, which asserts both the visual and textual elements to convey the intended message. Generally, book covers utilise symbols or metaphors to convey complex ideas and concepts concisely and effectively, as paratexts for literary works (Machin 2016). At present, research on book covers focuses primarily on how visual elements convey meaning, such as the effect of colours on the reader's emotional response, the reinforcement of narrative through images and photographs and the role of typography in conveying information about the book's content (Andrews 1999). Furthermore, some scholars argue that book covers convey content and serve as symbols of culture and ideology (Dhiwangkara and Ruslianti 2022; Lachman 2017). Although the function of visual elements for narrative and emotional expression on book covers has been discussed, visual metaphors have not been explored as thoroughly as other cover types, such as magazine and comic book covers. Additionally, there are few in-depth case studies on this topic.

This study addressed the research gap in analysing the symbolism of literary book covers by examining Lu Xun's 1926 design for the *Call to Arms* (nahan 呐喊) cover. As a prominent figure in modern Chinese literature, Lu Xun actively designed the covers of his books. His book design is characterised by its rich symbolism, alongside a simple and elegant form influenced by traditional Chinese aesthetics (Li and An 2020). Among his covers, the 1926 cover (Figure 2) is one of the most iconic covers of Lu Xun's works. This design not only embodies his ideals of literary revolution but also reflects the era's spirit through the imagery of "an outcry from inside the iron house" (Li and Li 2021). This study aimed to address three research questions:

1. What symbolic meanings are embodied by the visual elements on the cover of *Call to Arms*?

2. How do these visual elements connect metaphorically with the book's thematic content?

3. How do these symbolic metaphors reflect Lu Xun's design intentions?

This research applied the analytical methods of visual metaphor to examine the implicit meanings, such as layout, typography and colour, conveyed by the symbolic visual elements to answer the abovementioned questions. Consequently, this study could provide a framework for analysing literary book covers and a deeper insight into Lu Xun's artistic philosophy and design intentions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Covers of *Call to Arms*

Call to Arms, Lu Xun's first collection of short stories, left a lasting impression on the literary world, especially the Chinese realm. This book, first published in 1923, brings together some of Lu Xun's most prominent short stories that appeared in the famed magazine *New Youth* between 1918 and 1922. Amongst the published memorable pieces were "The Diary of a Madman" (kuangren riji 狂人日记, 1918), "Kung I-chi" (kong yiji 孔乙己, 1919) and "The True Story of Ah Q" (a Q zhengzhuan 阿 Q 正传, 1921). Undeniably, through his powerful stories and sharp criticism, Lu Xun provided insight into the social problems in early twentieth-century China. Lu Xun also earned a reputation comparable to that of Shakespeare and Tolstoy for his profound impact on national consciousness through those short stories (Davies 2013). Moreover, the short stories combined traditional Chinese literary style with Western modernist writing techniques, setting a milestone in the development of modern Chinese literature (Liu 2022).

Lu Xun designed two versions of *Call to Arms*, published in 1923 and 1926. The first version was published by The New Tide Society (xinchao she 新潮社) in 1923. One book of this version is housed at the Lu Xun Memorial Hall in Shanghai, measuring 19.5 × 13.3 cm, as shown in Figure 1. This cover has a dark red background with a black rectangular seal-like frame slightly above the centre of the cover. Within the rectangle, "呐喊" and "鲁迅" are printed in Song typeface, with wavy and straight lines below the Chinese characters. While modest in its design, the 1923 cover may have been too ordinary to be memorable. Subsequently, Lu Xun redesigned the book in 1926 with a size of 20 × 14 cm as a Crowd Series book (wuhe zhi zong 乌合之众), which is currently on display in the same hall as previously mentioned, as shown in Figure 2. While the original layout and colour scheme had been retained, the typography of the book's title was redesigned in the 1926 edition by Lu Xun, compared to the 1923 version. Characteristically, the typography of "呐喊" had been redesigned in a woodcut style with bold strokes and takes up a large part of the black frame, giving it a bold and powerful expression. The name "鲁迅" is placed underneath,

accompanied by quotation marks. Wang and Hong (2010) and Tao (2019) argued that the enlarged typography of the title creates a visual tension between the characters and the frame space, underscoring the themes of struggle and fighting prevalent in early twentieth-century China. Opposingly, Guo et al. (2022) contended that this sophisticated design enhances the cover's narrative function, making it a valuable object of study for Xun's literature. Identifiably, the 1926 cover has been recognised as a landmark design among all of Xun's books.

Apart from the two versions designed by Lu Xun himself, *Call to Arms* has been republished in China in numerous editions over the years. A total of 34 book versions from 1923 to 2004 were found in the National Digital Library of China (http://read.nlc.cn), including eight that directly adopted the 1926 cover design. Meanwhile, Lu Xun's design has been reintroduced into contemporary cover designs in *Call to Arms*. The two exemplary covers published in recent years were selected for analysis and obtained from the website of Dangdang, an online bookseller in China. The first book was published by Tianjin People's Publishing House in August 2018, as shown in Figure 3. This book cover directly adopts the title label design of the 1926 edition, placing the title and other information in the upper half of the cover. At the same time, the second book was published by Tiandi Publishing House in November 2023, as shown in Figure 4. While adding additional decorative textual patterns and a woodcut print, the cover inherits the typographic design and the red colour scheme, resulting in a more visually rich composition. In short, the 2018 and 2023 editions pay tribute to the 1926 version in different ways. Stylistically, this tribute is reflected in the visual form, which includes Lu Xun's literary spirit and ideological legacy. The 1926 cover of *Call to Arms* features minimalist yet impactful visuals that influenced its time and continue to inspire contemporary designers a century later.

Research about the 1926 *Call to Arms* Cover

The 1926 cover has generated wide discourse regarding its implicit meanings. Wang and Hong (2010) argued that Lu Xun's deliberate change in the Chinese character structure had endowed the cover with unique visual metaphorical meanings. Wang (2011) examined the colour symbolism of the cover from an intertextual perspective, interpreting the deep red as signifying blood and future hope, while the black rectangular frame symbolises death and misfortune. Zhang (2012) and Guo et al. (2022) noted that despite its minimalist design, the cover makes the reader feel the turbulent historical context of Republican China and reflects the social reality of oppression. Over and above

Figure 1 The 1923 version of *Call to Arms*

Source: Shanghai Lu Xun Memorial Hall

Figure 2 The 1926 version of *Call to Arms*

Source: Shaoxing Lu Xun Memorial Hall

Figure 3 The 2018 version of *Call to Arms*

Source: http://product.dangdang. com/25324579.html

Figure 4 The 2023 version of *Call to Arms*

Source: http://product.dangdang. com/29646392.html

that, Sun (2024) suggested that Xun's cover design integrates Eastern aesthetics with Western layout design by analysing the grid system of the cover. He also pointed out that the seal-like rectangle is a metaphor for a decaying social order, while the text embodies the people's cry for liberation from hardship. While the cover has been researched from various angles, most studies are limited to analysing a single visual element with subjective interpretations and a lack of systematic cover analysis. Consequently, this study aimed to innovate by applying the theory of visual metaphor to provide a novel interpretation of the cover's symbolic meanings.

Visual Metaphor

Metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon that refers to the representation or symbolisation of one concept by another. It is often used to facilitate the understanding of detailed abstracts and complex concepts (MacCormac 1972). Lakoff (1993) proposed the notion of conceptual metaphor, which he defined as a mapping between conceptual domains using the formula A is B, whereby A is the target domain, and B is the source domain. Beyond linguistics, Forceville (1994) extended the conceptual metaphor theory to images and proposed methods for identifying visual metaphors. Within the context of the "pictorial turn," visual metaphor has emerged as a popular research topic (Negro et al. 2018). As a powerful communicative tool, it facilitates the evocation of emotions through images and helps to clarify complex concepts for better understanding (Indurkhya and Ojha 2017). In advertising, numerous studies have explored the application and impact of visual communication (Antonova and Sokolov 2021; Das et al. 2024; Margariti et al. 2022; Ventalon et al. 2020).

Many scholars have proposed their analytical frameworks for interpreting visual metaphors. Forceville (2002) outlined three questions for identifying visual metaphors:

1. What are the two terms of the metaphor?

2. Which of the two terms is the "source domain" and which is the "target domain?"

3. Which feature(s) is/are mapped from the source domain to the target domain?

Based on linguistic metaphor analysis, Šorm and Steen (2013) presented a three-stage processing model applicable to visual metaphors, including incongruity perception, resolution, and contextual processing. This model links source and target domains through cognitive mapping and integrates contextual information to enhance metaphor comprehension. Negro et al. (2018) proposed a two-step analytical framework that begins with a holistic examination of the image before proceeding to decode its symbolic significance. Similarly, Cavazzana and Bolognesi (2020) further introduced a complex model that emphasises the critical role of individual experiential knowledge in metaphorical understanding. Recently, Su et al. (2024) applied AI image generation technologies, such as Stable Diffusion and DALL-E, to generate images that matched metaphorical texts, enabling intuitive interpretation of visual metaphors. Although these studies have mainly outlined the analytical steps in interpreting visual metaphors, there is a lack of a clear analytical model for interpreting metaphorical meaning, which may lead to unreliable semantic analyses.

Some scholars have also applied semiotic analysis to interpret the symbolic meaning. Based on the visual grammar theory of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), Feng and O'Halloran (2013) conducted a semiotic analysis of multimodal information by identifying and interpreting ideational, interactive and compositional meanings of multimodal messages. These studies provide a semiotic framework for understanding visual metaphors. Essentially, the semiotic analysis tends to emphasise structural interpretation, which makes it less flexible when dealing

with multi-metaphors and limits its adaptability. Additionally, these studies rely too much on specific cultural contexts and background knowledge when analysing complex metaphors, which may limit the applicability of their theoretical frameworks.

Conceptual Integration Theory

Conceptual Integration Theory, or blending theory, is a fundamental cognitive operation that explains how people combine different concepts to create new meanings. Fauconnier and Turner (1994) introduced the "many-space" model, which is used to explain the complexities of meaning construction. They posited that conceptual integration is a fundamental cognitive operation on par with analogy, recursion, mental modelling, conceptual categorisation, and framing. Fauconnier and Turner (1998) also proposed a conceptual integration network based on multiple metal spaces interacting with each other: a generic space (a mental space containing the common elements and structures shared by the input spaces), input spaces (at least two input spaces containing the initial concepts to be integrated), and a blended space (a new mental space where elements from the input spaces are combined and integrated to create a novel emergent structure). Fauconnier and Turner (2003) pointed out that the blending process is highly flexible, allowing various kinds (identity, transformation, representation, metaphor) to integrate across different conceptual domains. It is not static but is a dynamic and ongoing process. Additionally, the construction of meaning is not solely determined by the literal meanings of words, but by the complex interaction between the context and the individual's cognitive background (Kovalyuk 2019).

As a powerful cognitive mechanism, the theory has indeed found widespread applications across various domains. In language and linguistics, the theory is used in understanding language innovation mechanisms and cross-cultural communication, effectively revealing cognitive integration processes across different linguistic and cultural contexts (Guliyev 2023; Huang 2023; Kovalyuk 2019). In advertising and media, the theory provided valuable insights into the mechanisms of visual-linguistic interaction, information transmission strategies, and meaning construction processes (Džanić and Berberović 2021; Ibrišimović and Pezerović-Riđić 2019; Mierzwińska-Hajnos 2014). In cognitive processes, it can effectively reveal how politicians employ indirect communication strategies through language while simultaneously providing a tool for analysing political humour's underlying meanings and ideological implications (Abdulwahid and Hashim 2022; Džanić and Berberović 2017).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative case study approach to examine visual metaphors in literary book covers, focusing on Lu Xun's 1926 *Call to Arms* cover. The research design integrated two analytical frameworks: Wilcox's (2004) model of metonymic and metaphorical mapping to decode symbolic elements (layout, typography, and colour schemes) and the conceptual integration network to blend multiple metaphorical meanings within the broader context of the book's content and historical background. Considerably, this analysis uncovered the potential symbolic meaning behind the cover, as well as the visual dialogue between author and reader, offering a new perspective for symbolic expression in literary book covers.

Data Collection

The data collection process comprised two main components: acquiring cover images and collecting textual materials. The cover images were collected during visits to the three Lu Xun memorial halls in mainland China, including the Lu Xun Museum in Beijing, the Lu Xun Memorial Hall in Shanghai, and the Lu Xun Memorial Hall in Shaoxing. During these visits, the photos for the covers were taken with a Fujifilm X-E3 camera. As such, the text material was taken from the 2003 publication "Selected Stories of Lu Hsun" by W. W. Norton and Company, the English version of *Call to Arms* (Lu 2003). The book contained the foreword written by Lu Xun, which offered valuable insights into his life and his writing motivations. In addition, relevant academic literature, including books and journalistic articles analysing Lu Xun's writings, as well as cover design research, had been reviewed to complement the textual analysis.

Data Analysis

Due to the lack of a transparent analytical model for visual metaphors and the limitations of social semiotics in addressing cross-cultural metaphors, this study employed Wilcox's (2004) model of metonymic and metaphorical mapping in American Sign Language (ASL) to analyse the cover's symbolic meanings. Wilcox (2004) conducted a case study examining how a deaf participant named José had expressed his abstract thoughts and emotional experiences through ASL during a semi-structured interview. Essentially, he analysed José's narrative, focusing on how cognitive mappings and conceptual blending were able to create meaning through the interplay of metaphorical and metonymical structures. Figure 5 shows a Partial Mapping for Print-at-Forehead, one of the metaphorical mappings analysed in José's discourse.

The partial mapping illustrates how iconic and metaphorical mappings interact to create meaning. Iconic mapping indicates the direct, physical resemblance between a sign and its referent. In this case, the physical action José performed with his hands directly represented the actions associated with a computer and printing. Metaphorical mapping involves understanding one concept through another, often a more concrete concept. Similarly, in the source domain, the physical action would simulate typing on a keyboard and producing paper. Based on this source, the abstract concept's target domain was externalising internal thoughts, transforming private mental content into public expression. Noticeably, Wilcox utilised this analysis to display how José's ASL had revealed the underlying cognitive processes of metaphor and metonymy. By doing so, it not only helped the readers to look deeper than the surface indicators but also improved their understanding of the underlying conceptual structure in his narrative. The analysis also offered insights into the universal cognitive mechanisms of metaphor, metonymy and blending. Thus, the mapping model has been widely applied in analysing the grammatical structure of sign language and its effects on cognitive processing (Emmorey 2014; Mittelberg 2019; Wilcox and Martínez 2021).

ICONIC MAPPING	METAPHORICAL MAPPING	
Articulator	Source	Target
Index finger punches at forehead Flat hand moves forward from head	Single peck on keyboard Piece of paper flows from printer	Initiates access to thoughts Public display of private thoughts

Figure 5 Partial Mapping for Print-at-Forehead
Source: Wilcox (2004, 204)

Wilcox (2004) also applied the conceptual integration network by blending three metaphor meanings to understand José's thought process and psyche better. Figure 6 shows the conceptual integration network: Generic Space is a container holding something within José's discourse. To clarify, three input spaces are representative metaphorical mappings analysed in José's discourse, including the keyboard cover, the paper button, and the real key door of the safe. The blending space symbolised José's mental faculty and how he expressed himself, which involved a dynamic blending of computer, printer, and lockbox concepts via metaphors. This blend allows him to express his intellectual capacity and struggle for recognition powerfully and creatively.
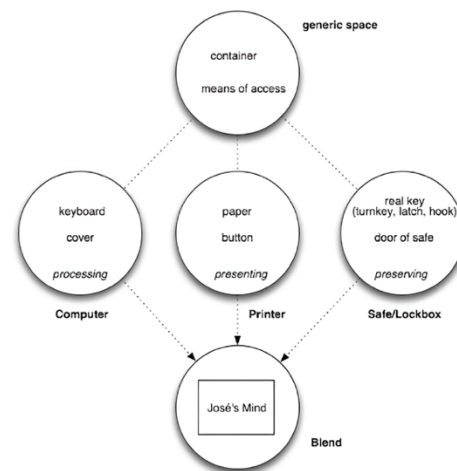

Figure 6 Conceptual integration of José's mind
Source: Wilcox (2004, 208)

The conceptual integration network provides an analytical framework for decoding the multi-layered metaphors embedded in the cover design of *Call to Arms*. The generic space can be seen as the cover's visual expression, including image, colour, typography and layout. By analysing the representative symbolic visual elements within the cover, their corresponding symbols within the cover constituted the corresponding input spaces. Then, by integrating these symbolic visual elements within the context and the book's theme, a novel composite meaning was generated, forming the blending space. Taking everything into account, this analytical network allowed researchers to not only elucidate how metaphorical elements interacted but also uncover the underlying thoughts and emotions through Lu Xun's masterpieces.

Data Analysis

This study applied Wilcox's metaphor analysis method and integrated visual features of literary book covers to conduct a comprehensive analysis. The analysis was conducted in three steps, as shown in Figure 7.

Step 1: Identify the Visual Elements with Iconic Mapping

First, this step involved identifying the visual elements of the book covers with iconic mapping. Before analysing, we examined the visual and textual associations of the book covers based on existing research. Next, the symbolic element was extracted using image software. A visual analysis was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the components.

Step 2: Determine the Metaphorical Mapping

After identifying the visual elements with the iconic image, the next step was determining the metaphorical image. In doing so, formal, or semantically similar images had to be found for the symbolic visual element, so-called source domains. Through this process, the meaning of the symbolic element was determined by comparing the similarities between the symbolic element and the similar image. This method allowed metaphorical connections between the symbolic element and the source domains.

Step 3: Check the Metaphorical Structure

For this step, the metaphorical structure had been validated by thoroughly examining the book's content and historical context. Subsequently, the interpretation sought to reveal the symbolic meanings embedded within the metaphorical elements. After analysing each metaphor, the conceptual integration network was deployed in the final stage to blend the different metaphors into one to reveal the symbolic semantics of the cover.
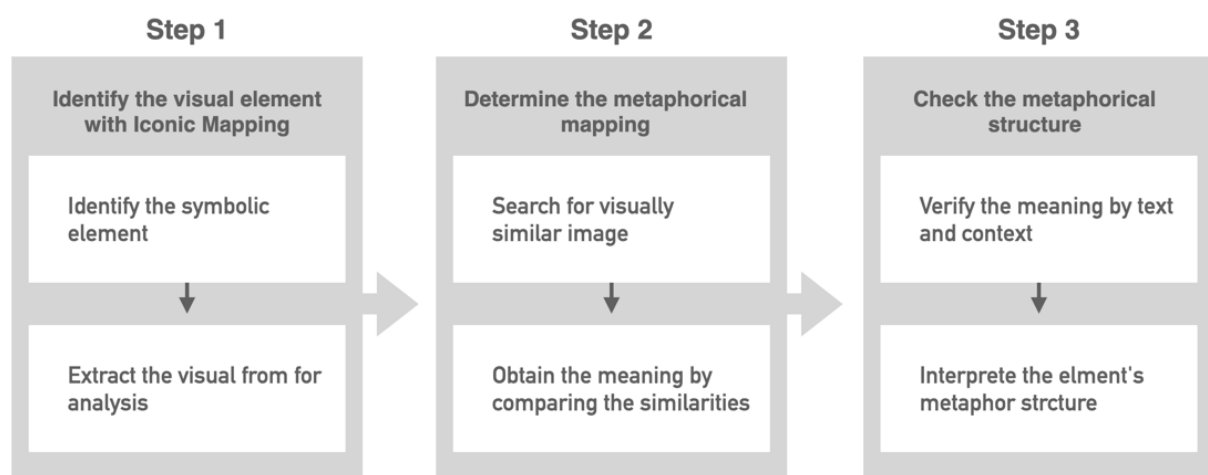

Figure 7 Three steps for the literary cover's metaphor analysis

RESULTS

Layout Metaphor for "Iron House"

In his cover design, Lu Xun transformed the traditional Chinese title format into a black box, symbolising the "iron house" in his book. Several researchers have pointed out that the black box on the cover was a metaphorical "iron house" of Chinese social reality in the early twentieth-century (Guo et al. 2022; Wang and Hong 2010; Zhang 2012). As the book's preface states: "Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, while many people are sleeping in it who will soon suffocate" (Lu 2003, 5). Illustrator software was used to divide the cover into a grid of three columns and five rows to understand the symbolic meaning better, as shown in Figure 8.

The black box occupies the top two-fifths vertically and the middle position horizontally, slightly to the left of the centre. The black is at the centre of the top half of the page. A German prison in Qingdao was built around 1900, as shown in Figure 9. As illuminated, the cramped cell held three prisoners, with a small, barred window centred in the back wall. Visually, there is a certain formal similarity between the cover composition and the interior of the prison room, especially the construction of the window on the back wall.

Apart from the visual formal similarities, the content also supports the metaphorical concept of the "iron house." To demonstrate, Lu Xun employed realistic writings to depict the tragic fates of people from different social classes (Wang 2022). For instance, in the story Kung I-chi, Mr. Kung, a scholar with much knowledge but living in poverty, was constantly ridiculed by the patrons of a small tavern in his town. In the end, his legs were broken for alleged theft, leaving his fate hanging by a thread (Lu 2003, 19–24). In "The True Story of Ah Q," the protagonist was an impoverished

farmer constantly ridiculed by his villagers, but he maintains a spirit of happiness. At the end of the story, Ah Q was falsely accused of robbery and eventually sentenced to death (Lu 2003, 65–112). Regrettably, the feudal society is ignorant and indifferent to others, resulting in many tragedies. For example, in the story "Medicine," Xia Yu had been executed for revolutionary activities, while the residents looked on indifferently. Absurdly, the father, Old Chuan, bought Xia Yu's blood bread to cure his son's illness. Eventually, his son, little Chuan, died due to the wrong treatment (Lu 2003, 25–33). To this effect, the black box layout effectively represents the "iron house" metaphor, capturing the reality of those living in this dark social environment.

In this layout metaphorical structure, the black block on the cover represents the metaphorical structure, as illustrated in Table 1. The source domain is the prisons of that era, and the target domain is the "iron house," mentioned by Lu Xun in the preface. More specifically, this metaphor conveys that Chinese people like Mr. Kung and Ah Q had been trapped by feudal ideologies that enforced compliance with injustice and stifled resistance. Consequently, this traditional mindset compelled individuals to blindly follow and exploit each other within society, as depicted by little Chuan's father. From this perspective, the black segment on the cover not only serves as a space for the title but also represents the Chinese people who had been constrained by restrictive feudal ethics, eventually leading to their shared tragic outcomes in society.
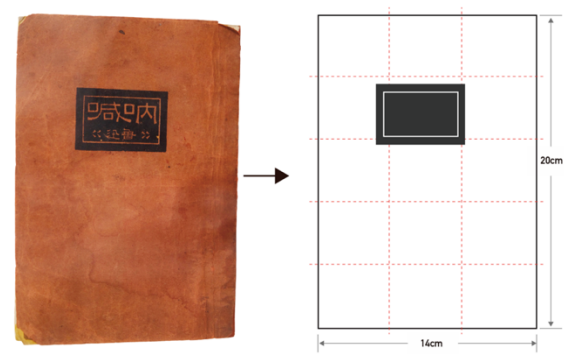

Figure 8 The grid analyses of the cover's layout

Figure 9 German prison in Qingdao around 1900

Source: https://www.8264.com/youji/5440104-4.html

Table 1 Partial mapping for the cover's layout.

Iconic mapping	Metaphorical mapping	
Layout	Source	Target
		In early twentieth-century China, the public from various social classes had faced harsh oppression due to the oppressive feudal system, referred to as the "iron house" in the book

Typography Metaphor for Resistance

The title on the cover plays a critical role, as it conveys both the content and the work's intended meaning (Symes 1992). Similarly, this principle is evident in the cover design of *Call to Arms*, whereby the title served as a central element of the thematic expression. Some researchers have suggested that the Chinese character "呐喊," which reflected the three mouths, symbolically represented courageous warriors who had raised their voices to awaken those who were sleeping in the "iron house" (Huang 2006; Tao 2019; Wang and Hong 2010).

To verify the symbolic meaning in the typography, the characters of "呐喊" were extracted from the original cover and redrawn using the Illustrator software, as shown in Figure 10. In the search for the existing Chinese font databases, two fonts that closely resembled the typographic designs, namely, the Clerical Script Variation (an ancient Chinese official script) and Hei Font (a Chinese sans serif font), were attained. Thereafter, a comparison of the strokes and structural features of the characters was crafted. It is found that Lu Xun's characters retained the "silkworm's head and swallow's tail" features of the Clerical script, and the character structure had expanded outwards on both sides. Meanwhile, Xun adopted the "Hei" font to simplify the strokes of the characters, resulting in a modern and simple design approach. Nonetheless, regarding character organisation, Xun interspersed the left and right strokes of the two characters to create a more visually striking group of both Chinese characters while conserving space within the black box. Visually, the two characters occupy most of the black space within the red outline, unintentionally creating an inner conflict by conveying the meaning of contradiction.

Figure 10 The typography structure analysis

In the book's preface, Lu Xun rationalised the motive behind the book, providing evidence for the symbolic metaphor of fearless warriors calling out to the sleepy masses. In the autumn of 1917, his friend Qian Xuantong (钱玄同, 1887–1939), the editor and author of *New Youth* magazine, invited Lu Xun to write for the magazine. As one of the most influential magazines in modern Chinese literature, *New Youth* aimed to enlighten China's independent spirit by exposing the social ills of the time through literature (Kenley 2004). Initially, Lu Xun was reluctant to write for the magazine because his literary activities had failed. Lu Xun and his brother Zhou Zuoren (1885–1967) launched the journal *Xin Sheng* (新生) and contributed articles and translations of foreign literature when studying in Japan from 1906 to 1909. Regrettably, they received a poor response from the targeted masses, which left Xun in despair and isolation. Having returned to China in 1909, he also witnessed the failure of the Xinhai Revolution and the terrible political situation in China, which made him doubt the revolution (Lu 2003, 3–4). So, Lu Xun regarded society as an iron house too solid to be destroyed. However, Qian contradicted his viewpoint, stating, "But if a few wake up, you can't say there is no hope of destroying the iron house" (Lu 2003, 5). Finally, Lu Xun was persuaded by his friend. He published his first short story, "Diary of a Madman," in *New Youth* Volume 4, Number 5, to respond to Qian Xuantong's invitation and support the brave literary warriors in *New Youth*. Subsequently, he published many works in the journal, which had far-reaching social impacts (Wang 2021). Lu Xun also turned these short stories, which he published in *New Youth* from 1918 to 1922, into the book *Call to Arms*. In the preface, he expressed his purpose for writing these stories: "I sometimes call out to encourage those fighters who are galloping on in loneliness, so that they do not lose heart" (Lu 2003, 5).

In this typography metaphorical structure, the characters of "呐喊" can be seen as the object of iconic mapping. By analysing Lu Xun's stated purpose in the preface, it can be concluded that Lu Xun's writing encouraged young writers, like his friend Qian Xuantong, to achieve intellectual enlightenment through literary works. An oil painting entitled *The Enlighteners* is displayed in the Memorial Hall of the New Culture Movement (Peking University Red Building), as shown in Table 2. It depicts a group portrait of the movement's key proponents, including prominent intellectuals such as Lu Xun, Hu Shi (胡适, 1889–1962) and Li Dazhao (李大钊, 1889–1927), amongst many others of similar advocates. The background shows many New Culture Movement magazines, like *New Youth*. From this point, the source of this metaphorical structure is centred on the corresponding young writers in the New Youth magazine. Furthermore, looking at the images of resistance created by two characters with the content of novels, it can be inferred that the target is the novelistic warriors who aimed to awaken the hopeless people to fight against the dark society by showing society's ills in their writings.

Table 2 Partial mapping of the cover's typography

Iconic mapping	Metaphorical mapping	
Typography	Source	Target
		The literary warriors of the *New Youth* used their writing to expose social issues and awaken the people sleeping in the feudal society to stand up against injustice

Source: https://www.meipian.cn/50poe5nq

Colour Metaphor for Revolution with Hope

Colour is an important means of creating atmosphere and visual effects. Artists often experiment and employ colours to convey their feelings and ideas (Jin 2022). As a master of colour application, Lu Xun often projected colours to vividly depict characters and settings in his literary works (Tan 2015). In the same way, he skillfully adopted colour matching in his cover design to express his feelings and thoughts. Although the colours on the cover were slightly faded in Figure 2, the red has been well preserved, resembling crimson red. The black on the cover retains its original colour quality.

Adobe Illustrator software was utilised to analyse the colours on the cover precisely. The black colour value was defined as hexadecimal colour code #211815, with CMYK values C: 0%, M: 0%, Y: 0%, and K: 100%. Relatively, the red colour value was defined as hexadecimal colour code #BD5A2C, and the CMYK values were C: 20%, M: 80%, Y: 100%, and K: 0%. Perceivably, colour parameters had been applied to recolour the cover, as shown in Figure 11. In the restored version of the cover, the predominant colour was a striking crimson, against which a black frame encloses the title in red. While Lu Xun redesigned the typography with the title within the black box in the 1926 version, the colour scheme remained unchanged.

The expression combining a red background with black blocks was a defining feature of constructivist posters and book designs. One notable example is the cover of *Veshch*, an influential international modern art magazine, which introduced modernist movements, including Russian constructivism, suprematism and Berlin and European Dadaism, serving as an exchange platform for young artists from the Soviet Union and Western Europe (Marten-Finnis and Dukhan 2005). Figure 12 is the Berlin edition of *Veshch* (number 1–2), designed by
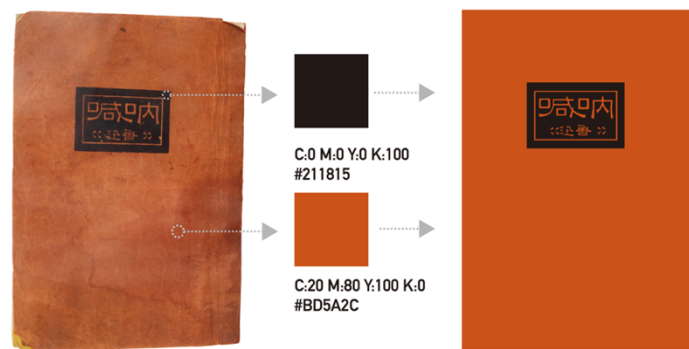
Figure 11 The colour extraction and appliance on the cover

Figure 12 The colour analysis of the cover of *Veshch* (Numbers 1–2)

Source: https://blog.lib.uiowa.edu/speccoll/2023/12/06/dada-collection-grows/

El Lissitzky (1890–1941) and published in March–April 1922, comprising 32 pages. As a coeditor and designer of *Veshch*, El Lissitzky, a prominent figure in the constructivist avant-garde, had envisioned the magazine as "a creation of new forms in art" (Renders 2022). By integrating principles from Suprematism and Constructivism, Lissitzky employed geometric forms with black and red colours to convey sociopolitical messages, which he believed art could "reorganise social form," an embodiment of his hope for a new era (Bulatova 2017).

The cover colours of *Veshch* closely resemble those of *Call to Arms*. To highlight, the black colour code found in *Veshch*, such as the hexadecimal colour code #211815, with CMYK values of C: 0%, M: 0%, Y: 0%, and K: 100%. The red colour was also very similar to Lu Xun's 1926 cover but slightly darker with a hexadecimal code of #C3512A and CMYK values of C: 15%, M: 85%, Y: 100% and K: 0%. According to Kandinsky (2009, 76), artists choose artistic forms that resonate with them to express their point of view. Despite using the colour scheme similarities in Lissitzky's constructivist design, did it imply that Lu Xun wanted to take a goal of revolution and aspirations for a new era in *Call to Arms*? It can be verified using colours in novels.

In the absence of light, black is frequently associated with negative connotations, including sadness, evil, and other negative implications (Karotovskaya et al. 2019). Correspondingly, the Chinese culture also perceived the subject of black as a symbol of misfortune or evil (Songkhai 2019). As Lu Xun described in "The True Story of Ah Q," "There was no moon that night, and Weizhuang (未庄) was very still in pitch darkness" (Lu 2000, 319). Lu Xun used "darkness" to illustrate the oppressive atmosphere in the village. Congruently, in "The Diary of a Madman," he wrote, "It was pitch dark. I did not know whether it was day or night" (Lu 2000, 35). Similarly, Lu Xun displayed the words "pitch dark" to represent the world from the madman's perspective,

reflecting the cruelty of the cannibalistic society. It can be said that the black colour played a crucial role in the narrative of these novels, serving as a metaphor for the depressing and gloomy social atmosphere at that time.

Red, the symbol of the sun and flames, is often associated with warmth, strength and courage. However, its intense sensory impact could also evoke negative feelings such as stress and conflict (Karotovskaya et al. 2019). Does the red colour on the cover of *Call to Arms* signify the meaning of revolution as depicted in the *Veshch* cover? The question can be answered by looking at the description of the colour red, which is penned in the novels. As previously mentioned, in "Medicine," there was a scene whereby the old father bought blood-soaked bread from executed revolutionaries as presented, "This man thrust one huge, extended hand towards him, while in the other he held a roll of steamed bread from which crimson drops were dripping to the ground" (Lu 2003, 26). Indicatively, the "crimson drops" symbolise blood and represent the cruel act of consuming revolutionary blood, evoking feelings of pain and brutality and forcing the reader to confront the bloody reality. It also expresses the pain and social shock caused by the revolution.

Nevertheless, it should be underscored that Lu Xun's crimson red had extended beyond its symbolism. As with the Chinese culture, colour is traditionally linked to success, prosperity and hope (Songkhai 2019). Even though most of Lu Xun's protagonists have tragic endings, some of his works contain a seed of hope. As he wrote in the preface, "This is why I often resort to innuendoes, as when I made a wreath appear from nowhere at the son's grave in 'Medicine,' while in 'Tomorrow' I did not say that fourth Shan's wife had no dreams of her little boy" (Lu 2003, 5). In his words, Lu Xun manipulated the crimson red colour not only to symbolise the difficult conditions of the revolution but also to express his hope for a better future for China. In this context, red conveys a similar meaning to Lissitzky's colour palette on the cover of *Veshch* (number 1–2), symbolising the social revolution for a new era.

In this metaphorical colour structure, the red background and the black box serve as an iconic mapping, as shown in Table 3. Undoubtedly, the colour scheme of *Call to Arms* parallels that of *Veshch* (number 1–2), reflecting Lu Xun's consideration of the meaning inherent in constructivist works—his call for social revolution. From this perspective, the cover of Veshch can be seen as the source domain in this metaphorical mapping. The black signified the oppressive society, while the crimson red had a double metaphorical meaning. On the one hand, because of its intense sensory stimulation, red symbolises conflict and pain resulting from social revolution. Conversely, as a symbol of hope and prosperity in Chinese culture, crimson red also embodies Lu Xun's aspirations for a brighter future in China. Consequently, the target domain integrates the two colours to capture Lu Xun's perspective on the grim reality of revolution in a repressive society, embodying his hope for a new era.

Table 3 Partial mapping of the cover's colours

Iconic mapping	Metaphorical mapping	
Colour	Source	Target
		Lu Xun used the black colour to symbolise the harsh realities of early twentieth-century society and deep crimson to reflect the painful fight for revolution and his hope for a new era

DISCUSSION

While each symbolic element of the cover—the layout, typography and colour—carries its meaning, these elements collectively form an integrated meaning system. Equitably, adopting the conceptual integration network (Figure 6), a systematic analysis to blend the symbolic elements into a unified meaning was performed, as shown in Figure 13. The cover of *Call to Arms* serves as a generic space that encapsulates all visual and symbolic elements. The layout, typography, and colour are selected as three input spaces. As for the layout design, the black rectangular box transcends its conventional function as a mere textual container, evolving into a symbolic visual representation of the "iron house" in the early twentieth-century Chinese social context, as depicted in Lu Xun's *Call to Arms*. It symbolically mirrors the oppressive and sombre atmosphere prevalent in the early twentieth-century in China. As for the typography design, it is not only the book's title but also embodies Lu Xun's motivation for writing the short stories in the *New Youth* journal. The writers of the *New Youth*, intellectual pioneers of social transformation, mainly represented by Lu Xun, sought to expose deep-rooted social issues. Their literary works sought to rouse public consciousness to resist the unjust society. As for the colour scheme, it not only sets the book's emotional tone but also expresses Lu Xun's aspirations for social revolution. Briefly, the black represents the darkness of social reality. In contrast, the red colour represents the intensity of revolutionary passion, which is closely associated with the symbolic meaning of the constructivist cover, exposing Lu Xun's expectations for a new era in China.
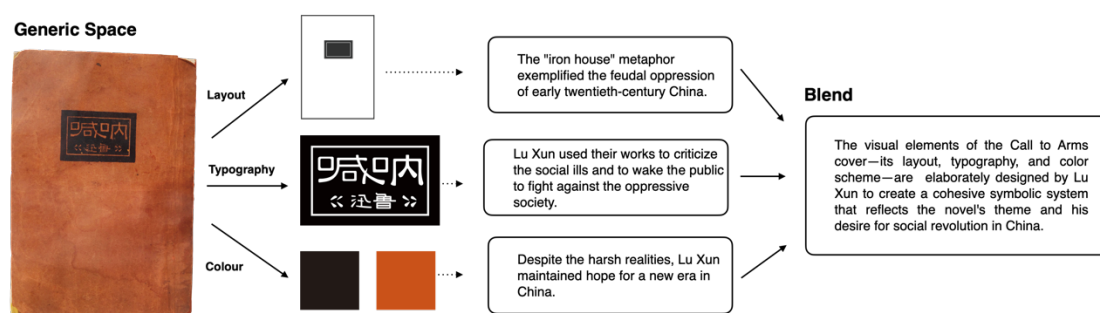

Figure 13 The visual metaphors analysis process of *Call to Arms*' cover

The three symbolic meanings have been incorporated into the Blend Space to construct a comprehensive symbolic interpretation. Markedly, the literary warriors of the *New Youth*, such as Lu Xun, exploited their literary works to criticise the deep-rooted social ills in early twentieth-century China. Through their writings, they sought to awaken the masses to break the shackles of traditional thought. Despite the challenges of the revolutionary period, Lu Xun's works embody his desire for social change and hope for a new epoch. In particular, the *Call to Arms* cover's visual elements, comprised of the layout deployment, typographic design and colour scheme, are elaborately designed by Lu Xun to form a coherent visual symbolic system. Conspicuously, the cover's visual expression effectively mirrors the theme of the novel and Lu Xun's aspirations for social revolution. Consequently, the cover design is not merely a decorative function for the book but rather a visual manifesto of Lu Xun's inner world for revolution.

This case study of Lu Xun's 1926 *Call to Arms* cover has been structured around a three-step analytical approach to explore the symbolic meanings embedded within its cover design, contributing to the visual metaphor analysis in literary covers. Initially, it performs a visual metaphor analysis to find matching objects for every visual element and to obtain a reliable semantic interpretation by considering historical factors, literary content, and the writer's unique experiences. Thereafter, it systematically presents the visual metaphorical structure by applying the ASL metaphor analysis model from Wilcox, enhancing the precision and reliability

of this research. Finally, it employs conceptual integration theory to blend the three symbolic elements' meanings, taking their contextual and book content to achieve a more comprehensive symbolic interpretation of the book cover. On the whole, it not only extends beyond the confines of a single discipline of art but also offers novel methods for the symbolic analysis of literary cover designs.

This study also proposes an analytical framework for interpreting symbolic meanings in literary book covers. In general, it focuses on the visual metaphorical analysis of the symbolic elements and applies the conceptual integration theory to blend the meanings of multi-metaphors, leading to a more straightforward interpretation of the implicit messages. Thus, the symbolic meaning presents more intuitive ways to improve readers' understanding than traditional methods, which often rely on intuition or semiotic interpretations. From a practical perspective, this research integrates methods from visual arts, cognitive discourse, and literary studies to provide an operational framework, expanding the interpretative space and methodological approaches for symbolic semantics. In this sense, this research would enhance the reader's understanding of literary cover symbolism while offering new insights into the metaphorical expressions found in artworks.

It is undeniable that this study has some limitations. While Wilcox's model offers a framework for interpreting the semantics of a deaf person's gestures, its application to analysing symbolic expressions in book covers presents certain limitations. While gestures are often explicit referents, visual elements in cover designs may lack such explicit correspondences, potentially affecting the accuracy of metaphorical interpretation. In other words, the limitation suggests that future research should further validate and modify the model's applicability to visual art analysis. Meanwhile, the analysis of visual metaphor in literary cover has been constrained to a single case study, lacking a comparative perspective with other literary works. Future research should broaden the scope to include a wider variety of literary covers, which could provide a more comprehensive understanding of visual metaphors. Additionally, this study primarily focuses on the formal analysis of the cover, overlooking a multidisciplinary approach that could enhance the interpretation of symbolic meanings. To address this limitation, future research could incorporate surveys or interviews to explore readers' perceptions of visual metaphors in literary covers.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, this study has explored the symbolic meaning of literary books, as discussed through a case study on the cover of *Call to Arms*, designed by Lu Xun in 1926. This paper employed Wilcox's metaphor analysis model and the conceptual integration network to examine how visual metaphors have expressed implicit meanings and projected the author's emotions in the book. The results indicate that examining the two analytical frameworks has been a suitable tool for deciphering the deeper meanings in the literary covers. To put into perspective, when analysing symbolic meanings, one should consider various factors, such as the book's content, its historical context, and the author's experiences, to enable the analysis to obtain a more proper interpretation. Given that this study focuses solely on a single book cover, future research should explore a broader range of literary covers and apply numerous methods to enhance the reliability of interpreting symbolic meanings.

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