

# Medical Metaphor in Economic News by Chinese Mainstream Media: A Case Study of Involution-Related News

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Against the backdrop of China's pursuit of high-quality economic development, involution has become a prominent social and economic concern and is widely discussed in economic news from Chinese mainstream media. In such news reports, metaphor is widely adopted by journalists to interpret abstract economic phenomena, and medical metaphors are particularly prevalent in narratives of involution. Media practitioners commonly conceptualize involution as an ailment, equating its negative manifestations with disease symptoms and relevant governance measures with medical treatments. This approach clarifies abstract economic concepts through medical cognitive logic. This paper adopts Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) as its core research method to explore the use of medical metaphors in involution-related economic news from Chinese mainstream media. The findings reveal that the appropriate use of medical metaphors can effectively refine news discourse and boost textual expressiveness. On this basis, these linguistic devices help the public fully grasp the requirements of economic transformation, further facilitate the formation of positive social consensus to advance sound economic development, and provide practical implications for rhetorical expression in economic news, thus enabling such discourse to better fulfill its functions in positive communication and public opinion guidance.

*Keywords:* medical metaphor, economic news, involution, Critical Metaphor Analysis

## Introduction

China's economy now pursues high-quality and efficient growth, whose transition brings diverse challenges including prominent economic involution. The term *involution* describes excessive corporate competition and frequently appears in mainstream economic news. Involution-related news helps interpret current economic development and frequently uses medical metaphors to simplify abstract involution phenomena for the general public.

Metaphors serve as vital cognitive and linguistic tools widely applied in news writing. Proposed by Charteris-Black (2004), Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) is a research approach that identifies and interprets metaphorical expressions to uncover their underlying intentions. This study thereby provides a reference for the practice of economic news discourse.

## Critical Metaphor Analysis of Medical Metaphors

To systematically analyze the underlying implication of medical metaphors in economic news, this study adopts Critical Metaphor Analysis. CMA provides an analytical framework, namely metaphor identification,

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metaphor interpretation, and metaphor explanation. By identifying metaphorical expressions, interpreting their cognitive motivations, and explaining their functions, CMA enables a comprehensive analysis of how medical metaphors construct public understanding of involution in economic news discourse.

**Metaphor Identification**

Metaphor identification refers to determining metaphorical expressions from the selected texts. The research materials are selected from authoritative mainstream media, including *People’s Daily*, *Xinhua News Agency*, and *Guangming Daily*. The identification process follows CMA framework for medical metaphors in economic involution news to guarantee analytical objectivity and accuracy. All qualified metaphors should take medical or bodily concepts such as human organs, diseases, and treatments as their source domain, and their target domain needs to cover economic involution and relevant governance strategies. After identification, a total of 19 metaphorical keywords were collected, which were further generalized into three conceptual metaphors: “Involution Is Disease”, “Economy Is Human Body”, and “Governance Is Treatment”.

Table 1  
*Conceptual Metaphors Statistics of Involution-Related Economic News*

Conceptual Metaphor	Metaphorical Keywords	Frequency	Ratio (%)
INVOLUTION IS DISEASE	lesion (病灶)	1	3.85%
	crux (症结)	3	11.54%
	intractable disease (顽疾)	3	11.54%
	chronic illness (痼疾)	1	3.85%
	malignant tumor (毒瘤)	1	3.85%
	disease symptom (病症)	1	3.85%
	disease cause (病因)	1	3.85%
	Subtotal	11	42.31%
ECONOMY IS HUMAN BODY	blood loss (失血)	1	3.85%
	blood generation (造血)	1	3.85%
	puffiness (虚胖)	1	3.85%
	zombie (僵尸)	1	3.85%
	physical health (健康)	2	7.69%
	metabolism (新陈代谢)	1	3.85%
	vein (脉络)	1	3.85%
	Subtotal	8	30.77%
GOVERNANCE IS TREATMENT	medical prescription (药方)	2	7.69%
	blood transfusion (输血)	1	3.85%
	self-rescue (自救)	2	7.69%
	effective medicine (良药)	1	3.85%
	treat both symptoms and root causes (标本兼治)	1	3.85%
Subtotal	7	26.92%	
Total	19	26	100%

**Metaphor Interpretation**

Metaphor interpretation aims to reveal pragmatic and cognitive factors that shape the metaphors. The analysis is conducted by mapping metaphors from their source domains to target domains, illustrating how medical metaphors in economic news discourse are constructed.

**“Economy Is Human Body” metaphor.** The “Economy Is Human Body” metaphor covers keywords like blood loss, metabolism, and physical health. These physiological terms depict economic operation by equating

the economy to a human body, transferring bodily traits to economic conditions. Healthy bodies symbolize thriving economies, whereas ailments stand for stagnant economic performance. Derived from bodily experience, this cognitive mapping simplifies abstract economic phenomena via medical concept.

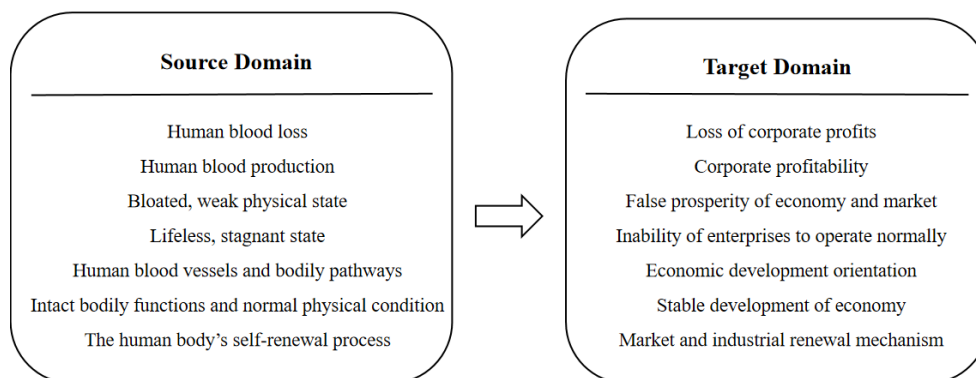


Figure 1. The mapping diagram of “Economy Is Human Body”.

Example (1):

Text: 低于成本的价格竞争导致企业造血能力不足。

Translation: Price competition below cost has led to insufficient blood generation capacity of enterprises.

Example (2):

Text: 行业普遍失血，毛利率极低，几乎没有利润。

Translation: Industry is generally losing blood, with extremely low gross profit margins and almost no profits.

The human blood-generating system supplies energy to maintain bodily functions. Corporate self-profitability is metaphorically equated to this mechanism for steady business operation. Poor blood generation endangers human life. Similarly, the loss of independent profitability threatens the survival and development of an enterprise.

Analysis of these examples shows that mapping economic systems to the human body reflects the cognitive tendency to comprehend the economy operation through the biological mechanism. Expressions such as blood loss and blood generation endow economic activities with human attributes. Economic development exhibits either sound or abnormal states, which convey economy conditions and developmental trends.

**“Involution Is Disease” metaphor.** This metaphor follows the logic that an economic system will suffer disorders as human beings fall ill, and involution is viewed as a disease weakening its steady operation. Thus, the concept of disease is employed to conceptualize involution.

Example (3):

Text: 中央经济工作会议进一步将“深入整治‘内卷式’竞争”列为明年重点任务。这深刻表明，破除这一痼疾，对于畅通经济循环、激发创新活力、实现更高水平的供需平衡至关重要。

Translation: The Central Economic Work Conference further listed deeply rectifying involution competition as a key task for next year. This clearly indicates that eradicating this chronic illness is crucial for smoothing economic circulation, stimulating innovative vitality, and achieving a higher level of supply-demand balance.

In the source domain, chronic illness is characterized by long-term existence and difficult for treatment. When applied to describe involution, this metaphor projects the feature of chronic diseases onto involution,

indicating that involution competition is a problem of long duration and great difficulty in governance. From the example, it is clear that medical metaphors effectively depict the traits of involution. With expressions like chronic illness, they illustrate its harmfulness, diverse manifestations, and complicated factors. Thus they reveal the drawbacks of involution and convey the urgency to tackle this undesirable economic issue.

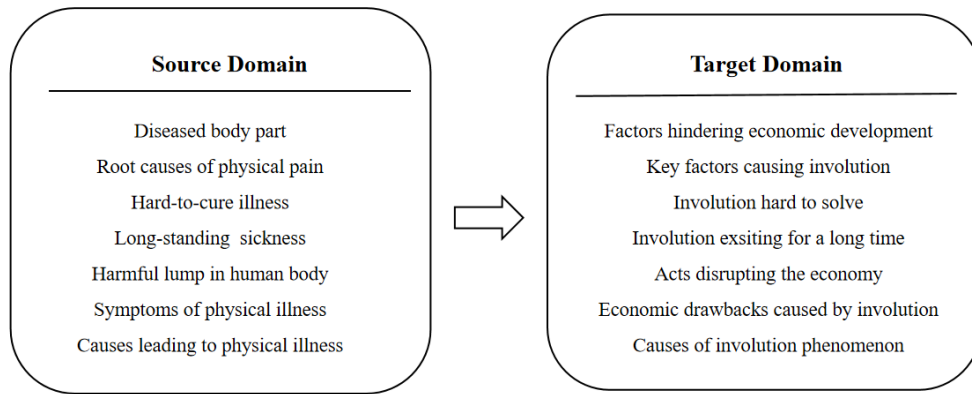


Figure 2. The mapping diagram of “Involution Is Disease”.

**“Governance Is Treatment” metaphor.** Through keywords such as intractable disease, involution is described as a harmful condition that requires treatment. Correspondingly, strategies for governing involution are metaphorically mapped to medical treatment. Source-domain treatment means symptom-specific interventions to remove illnesses and recover health. This logic transfers to involution governance. Corresponding policies are measures targeting involution’s traits and roots to erase its economic harms.

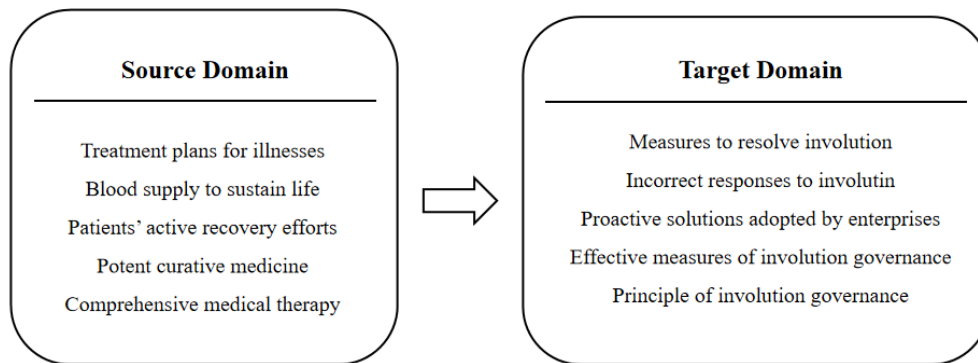


Figure 3. The mapping diagram of “Governance Is Treatment”.

Example (4):

Text: 十大制度建设成果是市场监管总局针对“内卷式”竞争开出的“组合药方”。

Translation: The ten major institutional construction achievements are a “combined prescription” issued by the State Administration for Market Regulation to address “involution” competition.

A “combined prescription” refers to a treatment plan in which doctors use multiple medications. This metaphor is projected onto the target domain of governance measures, indicating that the institutional achievements are a systematic set of arrangements formulated to target problem. Economic news uses such metaphors to compare the official measures of rectifying involution to the means of treatment. They intuitively highlight effectiveness of the measures, and also convey the positive governance attitude of properly resolving problems and stabilizing market order.

### **Metaphor Explanation**

Metaphor explanation reveals the relationship between metaphors and social contexts, as well as the social ideology and power relations contained in metaphors. Therefore, the factors influencing the use of medical metaphors in economic news related to involution and their potential effects will be analyzed.

**Reinforcement of health-oriented value.** Involution has become a major barrier to high-quality economic and leads to widespread inefficient competition. Medical metaphors help media interpret this issue with intuitive health-related concepts and enhance public understanding of relevant economic policies.

Ideology governs language and guides metaphor selection. Medical metaphors originate from people's daily health cognition. The public generally values physical well-being and treats stable bodily functions as ideal while viewing physical disorders negatively. This cognitive pattern is applied to economic analysis. The economic system is compared to a self-regulating human body. A healthy economy features balanced operation, sustainable growth, and steady profitability. Any unfavorable economic change is seen as an unhealthy condition. Negative issues such as weakened profits and poor innovation are equated with physiological problems including blood loss and blocked metabolism. Involution is accordingly defined as a destructive disease that damages industrial ecology. Medical metaphors ultimately reveal a core value that healthy economic development is recognized as the norm whereas harmful involution must be identified and resolved.

Essentially, medical metaphor adoption is ideologically motivated. The universal pursuit of physical wellness provides a cognitive and ideological foundation, enabling the public to intuitively recognize the hazards of involution and accept the rationality of targeted governance measures.

**Implementation of persuasion and guidance.** Medical metaphors in economic news deliver persuasive and emotional functions. They shape public cognition, evoke emotional resonance, and justify official economic governance. Phrases like blood generation and blood loss convert abstract economic situations into daily health experiences. News links economic disorder to bodily harm to emphasize the severity of involution. It helps the public fully understand the damages involution brings to economic development. The concept of a healthy market compares stable market operation to physical wellness. It visualizes the intangible features of a qualified market. These metaphors simplify complicated economic concepts, lower public cognitive difficulty, and help people understand economic issues directly.

Medical metaphors can also ease public anxiety through positive emotional guidance. Governance measures described with terms such as prescription and medicine gain professionalism similar to clinical treatment. People's inherent trust in medical therapies strengthens their recognition of relevant policies. These metaphors deliver optimistic expectations for industrial upgrading and economic recovery. They effectively relieve negative emotions caused by involution. Overall, medical metaphors improve the credibility of news discourse. They boost public acceptance and confidence in economic policies and offer solid cognitive support for policy implementation.

**Construction of problem-solver identity.** Apart from persuasive and emotional functions, medical metaphors help shape the government's identity as a professional and accountable problem solver. Such metaphors portray involution as an economic disease and affected markets as patients. This narrative requires an authoritative party to diagnose problems and deliver effective solutions. It logically assigns the dominant regulatory role to the government.

Medical metaphors build the image of the government as a professional diagnostician. Media frame involution as diseases and industrial defects as economic root problems to showcase the government's thorough research and accurate judgment of complicated economic issues. This reflects its deep understanding of industrial operation and professional governance capacity. These metaphors also strengthen the government image as a competent administrator. Regulatory and industrial upgrading policies are compared to targeted prescriptions and systematic treatments. Such wording highlights the professionalism of anti-involution policies and shows the government's strong capability and active willingness to fix economic troubles.

By employing medical metaphors to interpret governance practices, the media consolidates public perceptions of the government's problem-solving capacity. This approach boosts confidence in market and industrial recovery. It also promotes public acceptance of regulatory policies and helps the government build a trustworthy image in economic governance.

### Conclusion

This study focuses on medical metaphors in involution-related economic news, aiming to explore how medical concepts are mapped onto involution-related issues, and to reveal the functions performed by these metaphors. The findings confirm that medical metaphors serve as a vital discursive device in economic news. They not only help the public understand abstract economic phenomena but also increase public acceptance of relevant policies and support their implementation.

Medical metaphors turn abstract economic concepts into familiar medical experiences, reducing the cognitive burden for the public and making complex economic issues more accessible. Meanwhile, medical metaphors convey a clear stance against disorderly involution and support for benign market competition. They also highlight the professional and scientific nature of governance policies, boosting public confidence and providing reliable cognitive support for policy implementation. Accordingly, the appropriate use of medical metaphors may help improve the readability and persuasiveness of news reports, enhance public understanding of economic policies, and contribute to more effective communication of economic information.

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