

CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR “CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR” IN VIETNAMESE PRESS DISCOURSE

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Abstract: *This study investigates the conceptual metaphor “CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR” within 300 official Vietnamese news articles published between 2021 and 2025. Employing the Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP) within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics, the study extracts 1,570 metaphorical expressions, indicating that the WAR source domain is emerging as a dominant cognitive frame in environmental discourse. The radial category analysis, with the verb “CHỐNG” (to fight/combat) serving as the core, indicates a diachronic shift from political commitments framed as a “declaration of war” (Net Zero) toward “civil defense” strategies (shields/fortresses) in response to increasingly severe natural disasters. In this study, “people’s war” is utilized as an interpretive label, whereby climate change is personified as an “invader” (giặc) to elicit patriotism and community solidarity. The study contributes to elucidating the discursive dimension of ecolinguistic approaches and recommends a balanced use of war metaphors to mitigate “war fatigue” in public communication.*

Keywords: *climate change, conceptual metaphor, ecolinguistics, Vietnamese press discourse, war source domain*

I. Introduction

Cognitive Linguistics, particularly Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT), has provided effective tools to decipher how humans conceptualize abstract issues. In Vietnam, although this approach has been founded by scholars such as Ly Toan Thang and Tran Van Co, the field of ecolinguistics remains a significant gap. Meanwhile, Climate Change - a complex and difficult to observe phenomenon is being densely “concretized” in Vietnamese press discourse through expressions related to WAR such as “cuộc chiến”

(war), “giặc thiên tai” (disasters as enemy invaders), or “pháo đài xanh” (ecological defenses). In this context, there is still a lack of systematic descriptive studies on how the Vietnamese press employs the WAR source domain to structure discourse on climate change. This article focuses on analyzing the conceptual metaphor CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR in 300 official news articles from the 2021-2025 period. Through decoding mappings from the WAR source domain, the study demonstrates how press discourse constructs and shapes the cognitive

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frame regarding climate change within the official media space according to the logic of “Chiến tranh Nhân dân” (People’s War), while also indicating a cognitive shift from political commitments (Net Zero) to a survival imperative for action within the community.

II. Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in Cognitive Linguistics, focusing on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT). According to Lakoff and Johnson (1980), metaphor is not merely an artistic rhetorical device but a cognitive mechanism, wherein we understand and experience a target domain (typically abstract and complex) through the attributes of a source domain (typically concrete and familiar). In this study, the target domain CLIMATE CHANGE is structured through the WAR source domain.

In Vietnam, scholars such as Ly (2005) and Tran (2007) have laid the foundation for applying cognitivism to the Vietnamese language, asserting that language reflects how humans perceive the surrounding world. Regarding discourse on Climate Change, the war metaphor helps “concretize” a difficult-to-observe phenomenon into an adversarial situation involving tangible entities. Another critical theoretical component applied is the Radial Category model by Lakoff (1987).

This model allows for the identification of a central cognitive core (prototype) and extensions based on resemblance logic. In Vietnamese press discourse, the verb “CHỐNG” (to combat/fight) acts as the core, establishing a minimalist adversarial structure that serves as a premise for tactical extensions such as “phòng thủ” (defense/shield) or “chiến lược” (strategy/combat scenarios).

Finally, the study integrates the concept of “Chiến tranh Nhân dân” (People’s War)

as a culturally specific interpretive label. The personification of natural disasters as “Giặc” (Invader) is not merely a lexical choice but an activation of historical memory regarding national defense (vệ quốc), transforming CC response into a patriotic duty and community solidarity.

III. Research methodology

The study employs a qualitative method combined with preliminary quantitative analysis to investigate the Conceptual Metaphor (CM) system in press discourse.

3.1. Research corpus

The corpus consists of 300 articles on the topic of Climate Change published between 2021 and 2025. The articles were collected from 10 top digital transformation press agencies in Vietnam in 2024 (according to the Ministry of Information and Communications), including: Lao Dong, VnExpress, VietnamPlus, Tin Tuc, Dai Bieu Nhan Dan, Thanh Nien, Nhan Dan, Vietnamnet, Nha bao & Cong luan, and VTC News. These are official news sources with significant influence on shaping public perception.

3.2. Metaphor Identification Procedure (MIP)

The author applies the 4-step procedure of the Pragglejaz Group (2007) to extract metaphorical expressions: (1) Read the entire text: To grasp the general content and context of environmental messages; (2) Identify lexical units: Isolate keywords potentially belonging to the WAR source domain; (3) Compare meaning: Compare the meaning in the context of Climate Change with the basic meaning (typically related to actual military actions) to identify differences; (4) Determine metaphoricality: Confirm the lexical unit as metaphorical

if the difference is based on structural similarity (e.g., “xâm thực” (encroachment/erosion) of seawater resembles “xâm lược” (invasion) of an army).

3.3. Data analysis and processing

Following extraction, the data were classified into 6 main attribute groups of the WAR source domain, including: (1) Enemy Entities, (2) Battlespace, (3) War Actions, (4) Combatant Forces, (5) Weaponry & Military Assets, and (6) War Outcomes.

To minimize subjective bias, the identification process was conducted in multiple rounds, with ambiguous cases cross-referenced within specific contexts. Descriptive statistical methods were applied to determine the frequency and shifting trends of metaphorical expressions over time, particularly the shift from a “declaration of war” mindset to “civil defense” in the face of severe disasters such as Super Typhoon Yagi. Finally, the radial

category model was utilized to explain how semantic branches radiate from the core “CHỐNG” (to combat/fight) into deeper professional fields such as response scenarios or technological engineering.

IV. Research results and discussion

4.1. Research results: Identification of WAR metaphors

4.1.1. Statistical results and general identification

Following the application of the MIP procedure to 300 articles within the research corpus, 1,570 metaphorical expressions related to war were extracted. The metaphor identification process was conducted in multiple rounds to minimize subjective bias; during this process, ambiguous cases were cross-referenced within the broader context of the articles. The statistical results regarding the frequency of occurrence of attribute groups are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Frequency of attributes within the WAR source domain

No.	Attribute Group	Representative Linguistic Expressions	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Enemy Entities	Fire invaders, saline intrusion invaders, invisible enemy, climate culprit, peril of the century.	245	15.6%
2	Battlespace	Smokeless battlefield, frontline, critical weak points, adaptation battlefield.	180	11.5%
3	War Actions	Combating/Fighting climate change, responding, attacking, exposing, encroachment, combat scenarios, total force mobilization.	410	26.1%
4	Combatant Forces	Soldiers (every citizen), media warriors, core vanguard force, commander-in-chief.	280	17.8%
5	Weapons & Military Assets	Golden key, sharp weapon, green shield, fortress, adaptation tool, protective fence	265	16.9%
6	War Outcomes	Victory, failure, damage, losses, annihilating storm, healing wounds.	190	12.1%
Total			1,570	100%

Statistical results from the corpus of 300 articles reveal a very high density of metaphorical expressions, totaling 1,570 instances (averaging 5.23 expressions/article), confirming that the WAR source

domain is not merely a discrete rhetorical device but has established itself as a dominant conceptual metaphor (CM) system in Vietnamese press discourse on Climate Change.

The predominance of the War Actions group, comprising 410 out of the 1,570 total instances (26.1%) and characterized by strong verbs such as “chống”(to combat/fight), “tấn công” (to attack), and “huy động tổng lực” (to mobilize total forces), suggests that the press tends to frame scientific environmental phenomena as an urgent “political mandate”. In particular, the function of the verb “CHỐNG” (to combat/fight) as the core within the radial category model helps establish a structure of direct confrontation, compelling readers to perceive environmental information through the lens of survival.

A distinctive feature of Vietnamese discourse is the combination of the Combatant Forces and Enemy Entity groups. The personification of natural disasters as “Giặc lửa” (Fire as Invader) and “Giặc hạn mặn” (Salinity as an Invader) evokes familiar associations within historical memory, thereby contributing to the mobilization appeal of environmental messages. When Climate Change is referred to as an “Kẻ thù vô hình” (Invisible Enemy), the “Chiến tranh Nhân dân” (People’s War) model is immediately activated, transforming every individual into a “chiến sĩ” (soldier) and every civil solution into a sacred patriotic duty.

Notably, the Weaponry/Military Assets category reflects a diachronic shift in Vietnamese cognitive framing. Analysis of the 265 expressions identified shows that during 2021-2022, “weapons” primarily mapped onto macro-political commitments, such as “Net Zero,” accounting for 35% of the data (n ~ 93). By 2024-2025, however, following the environmental devastation of events like Super Typhoon Yag, the conceptual focus transitioned toward defensive strategies.

Expressions such as “Lá chắn xanh” (Ecological Shielding) and “phòng tuyến thích ứng” (Adaptive defense lines) emerged as dominant motifs, representing 65% of the corpus (n ~ 172). This trend indicates that WAR-related metaphors in Vietnamese discourse extend beyond offensive connotations; they are rooted in a “vệ quốc” (national defense) ethos, which prioritizes socio-ecological stability and community resilience in response to escalating climate war.

4.1.2. *Metaphorically used words and linguistic expressions*

Group 1: Climate change and natural disasters are enemy entities (Adversarial Entities)

In this group, natural phenomena are personified into a force possessing a destructive will, threatening survival.

- Metaphorically used words: Giặc (Invader), kẻ thù (enemy), thủ phạm (culprit), hiểm họa (peril/menace), đối phương (adversary).

- Linguistic expressions:

(1) “Vật lộn với ‘giặc lửa’ để dập tắt những đám cháy rừng” [Grappling with ‘fire as invaders’ to extinguish forest fires] (Nhan Dan, July 21, 2022).

(2) “Biến đổi khí hậu - ‘kẻ thù vô hình’ đang đe dọa sức khỏe toàn cầu” [Climate change - the ‘invisible enemy’ threatening global health] (Vietnam+, November 09, 2024).

Group 2: Affected regions are the battlespace

Localizing risk areas into “hot spots” that require a concentration of forces.

- Metaphorically used words: Mặt trận (front/battlefield), tuyến đầu (frontline), trọng điểm xung yếu (critical weak points), rốn lũ (flood epicenter).

- Linguistic expressions:

(3) “Tác động tiêu cực của biến đổi khí hậu là ‘mặt trận không tiếng súng’” [The negative impact of climate change is a ‘smokeless battlefield’] (Cong Luan, September 24, 2021).

(4) “Các lực lượng trên tuyến đầu như quân đội, công an... ứng phó thiên tai” [Forces on the frontline such as the military, police... responding to natural disasters] (Thanh Nien, November 18, 2025).

Group 3: Response activities are WAR ACTIONS (Tactics/Combat Operations)

Political roadmaps and commitments are transferred into the logic of war planning and execution.

- Metaphorically used words: *Chiến* (to combat/fight - Core), *tác chiến* (combat operations), *ứng phó* (to respond/cope), *tổng lực* (total force), *chiến dịch* (campaign), *mệnh lệnh* (order/mandate), *xâm thực* (encroachment/invasion).

- Linguistic expressions:

(5) “Cuộc chiến chống biến đổi khí hậu” [The war fighting against climate change]. (*Dai Bieu Nhan Dan*, December 29, 2025)

(6) “Xây dựng kịch bản, phương án để ứng phó/tác chiến với thiên tai” [Building scenarios and plans to respond to/conduct combat operations against natural disasters] (Thanh Nien, November 18, 2025).

Group 4: Citizens and organizations are COMBATANT FORCES (Soldiers)

Every civil entity is assigned the responsibility and discipline of a soldier.

- Metaphorically used words: *Chiến sĩ* (soldier), *chiến binh* (warrior), *quân đội* (army), *tư lệnh trưởng* (commander-in-chief), *nòng cốt* (core/backbone).

- Linguistic expressions:

(7) “Mỗi người dân là một chiến sĩ, mỗi xã phường là một pháo đài” [Every citizen is a soldier, every commune is a fortress] (Vietnam+, October 28, 2021).

(8) “Lực lượng công an phát huy vai trò nòng cốt, xung kích” [The police force promotes its core, vanguard role] (Lao Dong, March 07, 2023).

Group 5: Solutions and response tools are WEAPONS & MILITARY ASSETS (Combat Means)

Science, technology, and policy are conceptualized as tools for attack or fortified defense.

- Metaphorically used words: *Vũ khí* (weapon), *lá chắn* (shield), *chìa khóa* (key), *pháo đài* (fortress), *công cụ* (tool/instrument).

- Linguistic expressions:

(9) “Khoa học công nghệ là động lực, chìa khóa cho mục tiêu Net Zero” [Science and technology are the driving force, the key to the Net Zero goal] (Tin Tuc, August 09, 2023).

(10) “Những vết nứt trong ‘pháo đài xanh’ [chính sách khí hậu]” [Cracks in the ‘ecological defenses’ [climate policy]] (*Dai Bieu Nhan Dan*, December 29, 2025).

Group 6: Success or failure of efforts is WAR OUTCOMES (Victory/Damage)

- Metaphorically used words: *Thắng lợi* (victory/triumph), *chiến thắng* (to win/victory), *thất bại* (failure/defeat), *tổn thất* (loss/casualty).

- Linguistic expressions:

(11) “Kịp thời xử lý thắng lợi các tình huống thiên tai” [Timely handling of natural disaster situations to achieve victory] (Tin Tuc, December 24, 2025).

(12) “Chúng ta chưa chiến thắng cuộc chiến khí hậu” [We have not yet won the climate war] (Vietnam+, November 24, 2025).

Taken together, these six attribute groups indicate that the Vietnamese press tends to employ a martial conceptual framework, recontextualizing climate change beyond its scientific dimensions. Within this discursive frame, natural disasters are metaphorically constructed as “invaders” targeting vulnerable “frontlines” a construction that underscores a perceived need for the “huy động tổng lực” (total mobilization) of societal resources. By positioning citizens as “soldiers” protected by technological and policy “shields,” the narrative suggests that achieving Net Zero transcends strategic objectives, being framed instead as a decisive “victory” for national security. This conceptual mapping appears to reconfigure abstract ecological risks into a structured narrative of defense, drawing upon the historical schema of the “People’s War” (Chiến tranh nhân dân) embedded in the collective consciousness.

4.1.3. Overall metaphorical scenario

The synthesis of the six attribute groups indicates that Vietnamese media discourse constructs a highly cohesive macro-scenario of the WAR conceptual metaphor. In this cognitive script, extreme climatic anomalies do not merely happen; they appear to act as intentional Enemy

Entities (Group 1) that invade specific regional areas identified as the Battlespace (Group 2), such as vulnerable coastal fronts. This perceived invasion necessitates the immediate mobilization of Combatant Forces (Group 4), positioning both the state apparatus and ordinary citizens as active defenders. To counter the adversarial threat, these forces deploy specialized Weapons and Military Assets (Group 5), including green technologies and ecological shields, executing coordinated War Actions (Group 3) anchored by the core concept of “chống” (combat/resistance). Ultimately, this synchronized defense mechanism is framed as a mandatory struggle to avert catastrophic casualties and secure favorable War Outcomes (Group 6) for planetary and community survival. This integrative framework suggests that the specific mappings are not isolated rhetorical devices but interconnected components of a systematic adversarial narrative structuring environmental cognition.

4.2. Mapping system of the WAR source domain

From the aforementioned metaphorically used words and metaphorical expressions, we can identify the source and target domain attributes frequently employed in press discourse as follows:

Table 2. System of mappings from the WAR source domain to the CLIMATE CHANGE target domain

Source Domain (WAR)	Mapping Direction (→)	Target Domain (CLIMATE CHANGE)
Enemy Entities	→	Extreme phenomena (storms, floods, saline intrusion)
Battlespace	→	Heavily affected regions (Mekong Delta, coastal areas), ideological discourse
War Actions	→	Emission reduction roadmaps, natural disaster response plans, total mobilization
Combatant Forces	→	Citizens, scientists, functional response forces
Weaponry & Military Assets	→	Green technology, renewable energy, Net Zero policies
War Outcomes	→	Achieving Net Zero goals, stabilizing climate, saving the planet

4.3. Radial category analysis with "CHỐNG" as the core

The radial category model of this metaphor establishes the verb "CHỐNG" (to combat/fight) as the central core.

The Core: "CHỐNG"

The word "chống" (as in "chống biến đổi khí hậu" (combating climate change) or "phòng chống thiên tai" (prevention and combat of natural disasters)) not only appears with high frequency but also functions to establish a minimalist adversarial structure, thereby allowing for extensions into strategies of defense, adaptation, and risk management: there exists a harmful acting force, and humans must create a counter-force to stop it. This is the core expression because it encompasses the most fundamental meaning of antagonism, serving as the foundation for all subsequent conceptual extensions.

Extensions:

From this core, metaphorical expressions radiate into more specialized branches based on specific functions of warfare:

- The Defense Branch - "Shield": This is a logical extension of the core "chống" to the attribute of physical protection. In war, a "lá chắn" (shield) blocks ballistic projectiles; in climate change, protection forests and dikes are conceptualized as "lá chắn" (shields) blocking waves and tidal surges. This extension transfers the concept from an adversarial action (combat) to an entity ensuring safety (shield).

(13) "Rừng ngập mặn đóng vai trò như một hàng rào bảo vệ vững chắc, ngăn chặn sóng, gió và triều cường xâm lấn." (Mangrove forests play the role of a solid protective fence, blocking waves, wind, and encroaching tides). (Vietnam+, August 23, 2024).

(14) "Về lâu dài, nhiệm vụ quan trọng... nhất là rừng tự nhiên, phòng hộ." (In the long term, the most important task... is natural and protection forests). (Tin Tuc, October 27, 2024).

- The Strategy Branch - "Combat Scenarios": This is an extension into the aspects of management and planning. When "chống" (combating) is no longer an immediate reflex but requires a system, the term "kịch bản tác chiến" (combat scenarios) (referred to by the press as response scenarios) emerges. It transforms dry scientific forecasts into action plans characterized by military discipline, requiring coordinated synergy between "binh chủng" (arms/branches of service) (representing different professional sectors).

(15) "Các bộ ngành và địa phương... công việc ứng phó với biến đổi khí hậu..." [Ministries, sectors, and localities... the work of responding to climate change...] (Dai Bieu Nhan Dan, July 14, 2023).

(16) "Kịch bản Biến đổi khí hậu Việt Nam được xây dựng 5 năm một lần..." [Vietnam's Climate Change Scenario is developed once every 5 years...] (Vnexpress, July 03, 2025).

- The Dramatic Antagonism Branch - "Guerrilla Warfare": This extension describes the abnormal and unpredictable nature of natural disasters. When storms and floods do not attack frontally but continuously change trajectory, the press likens them to "chiến thuật du kích" (guerrilla tactics), helping citizens visualize the danger of extreme threat posed by climatic anomalies.

(17) "Bão số 3 (Yagi) là cơn bão mạnh nhất trong 30 năm qua... biến đổi khí

hậu ngày càng phức tạp” [Typhoon No. 3 (Yagi) is the strongest typhoon in the past 30 years... climate change is becoming increasingly complex] (Tin Tuc, October 27, 2024).

(18) “Qua từng năm, những hiện tượng thời tiết cực đoan diễn ra ngày một nhiều hơn...” [Year by year, extreme weather phenomena are occurring more frequently...] (VTC News, November 16, 2025).

The application of the radial category model helps explain why Vietnamese press discourse can connect mundane actions (such as planting trees, saving electricity) with military concepts of significant magnitude (cuộc chiến thế kỷ - war of the century). It transforms environmental risks into a “trận chiến” (battle) for survival, thereby mobilizing national pride and the spirit of solidarity to achieve sustainable goals.

It should be noted that the selection of “chống” (to combat/fight) as the core is descriptive of the discursive trend within the surveyed corpus; this does not exclude the possibility that other verbs, such as ‘adaptation’ or ‘mitigation’ may play a central role in other corpora or contexts.

4.4. Discussion: Discursive and cultural implications

WAR metaphors in the Vietnamese press are not merely borrowings from the West but are deeply restructured through the historical consciousness of “Chống giặc ngoại xâm” (Fighting against foreign invaders). The personification of natural disasters as “Giặc” (Invader) (such as “Giặc hạn mặn” (Salinity as an Invader) and “Giặc lũ” (Flood as an invader)) has transferred patriotic sentiments into environmental discourse, transforming climate change response into a sacred

duty of defending the Fatherland. The cultural underpinning likely explains the prevalence of the “Defense - Containment” metaphor group (with keywords: “lá chắn” (shield), “pháo đài” (fortress), “phòng chống” (prevention and combat)) compared to a mindset of direct attack. This is a reflection of the village culture that values stability and the political policy of “prevention is better than cure,” aiming to transform every locality into a “pháo đài xanh” (ecological defenses) and citizens into active “chiến sĩ” (soldiers) on the front of sustainable adaptation.

WAR metaphors can be viewed as a dual lever in environmental communication and education. On one hand, it “simplifies” complex scientific data, helping the public easily visualize solutions through images of “vũ khí công nghệ” (technological weapons) or “lá chắn xanh” (green shields). More importantly, it evokes the consciousness of “chiến tranh Nhân dân” (People’s War), creating consensus to shift the governance model from passive response to “thời chiến” (wartime) implementation discipline, while simultaneously positioning the younger generation as active “chiến sĩ môi trường” (environmental soldiers). However, its usage requires moderation to avoid the “war fatigue” effect, ensuring messages are sufficiently urgent without causing paralysis due to fear.

V. Conclusion

Within the scope of the surveyed Vietnamese press corpus, it can be observed that the metaphorical trend CLIMATE CHANGE IS A WAR is organized into a relatively stable system within Vietnamese press discourse during the 2021-2025 period, demonstrating

the characteristics and role of the WAR source domain regarding environmental cognition. These results contribute to supplementing empirical descriptions for the research direction of Conceptual Metaphor within the Vietnamese context. However, the study still possesses certain limitations. The scale of data primarily focuses on online articles and official news bulletins; thus, it may not fully encompass the diversity of metaphorical expressions in everyday spoken language or regional dialectal variations. Furthermore, the study concentrates heavily on contemporary corpora (2021-2025) in Vietnam and lacks comparative research with foreign press corpora to contrast the similarities and differences in the mapping mechanisms of the source and target domains across different nations. Comparative analysis with the press discourse of other nations constitutes the next research direction. This will be a necessary expansion for future studies to provide a more comprehensive picture of human linguistic thinking regarding nature.

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ÂN DỤ Ý NIỆM “BIẾN ĐỔI KHÍ HẬU LÀ CUỘC CHIẾN” TRONG DIỄN NGÔN BÁO CHÍ VIỆT NAM

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Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu khảo sát hệ thống ẩn dụ ý niệm “BIẾN ĐỔI KHÍ HẬU LÀ CUỘC CHIẾN” trong 300 bài báo chính thống tại Việt Nam giai đoạn 2021-2025. Vận dụng quy trình nhận diện ẩn dụ (MIP) và khung lý thuyết Ngôn ngữ học tri nhận, tác giả trích xuất 1.570 biểu thức, phản ánh miền nguồn quân sự có xu hướng trở thành một trong những khung tri nhận chủ đạo trong diễn ngôn môi trường. Kết quả phân tích mô hình tỏa tia với hạt nhân là động từ “CHỐNG” cho thấy sự chuyển dịch tư duy từ các cam kết chính trị “Tuyên chiến” (Net Zero) sang chiến lược “Phòng thủ dân sự” (Lá chắn/Pháo đài) trước thiên tai khốc liệt. Trong nghiên cứu này, “chiến tranh Nhân dân” được sử dụng như một nhãn diễn giải, trong đó biến đổi khí hậu được nhân cách hóa thành “Giặc” để gợi dẫn lòng yêu nước và tinh thần đoàn kết cộng đồng. Nghiên cứu góp phần làm rõ khía cạnh diễn ngôn trong tiếp cận ngôn ngữ học sinh thái, đồng thời khuyến nghị việc cân bằng ẩn dụ cuộc chiến để tránh tâm lý “mệt mỏi vì chiến tranh” trong truyền thông đại chúng.

Từ khóa: ẩn dụ ý niệm, báo chí Việt Nam, biến đổi khí hậu, miền nguồn cuộc chiến, ngôn ngữ học sinh thái

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