External Communication Research of the Belt and Road Initiative ——Comparative analysis of the relevant reports on the Belt and Road Initiative in China daily, CNN and CNBC

Liaoran Hu[1, a]

27 Shanda Nanlu, Licheng District, Jinan, Shandong province, China

15098717179@163.com (Email)

+86 15098717179 (Contact number)

Abstract. The research on the status quo and problems of Chinese and foreign media reports proposed by "One Belt And One Road" is of necessity and importance to the improvement of China's international influence and the enhancement of China's external communication capacity.

This article mainly uses content analysis method and takes China Daily in china and CNN and CNBC in United States as research objects, through the feature analysis and comparative study of the Belt and Road Initiative report, and finally found that the reporting agenda of China Daily, CNN and CNBC three media was similarly set up from three aspects: economic, social and ecological civilization construction, and all of them paid the greatest attention to the economic and trade initiatives of the initiative in the report. In addition, under the ideological conflict, there are obvious differences in attitudes in the economic issues of the "Belt and Road Initiative" in the Chinese and American media. In contrast, some of the social infrastructure and ecological civilization construction with low relevance to ideology in the initiative have gained consistent recognition attitude in different media in China and the United States. In terms of the reporting attitudes and inclinations, the study found that there are still some obvious differences in the perception of China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative by the Western media and the public, which is largely due to the misunderstanding and distorted reports from western media's "One Belt, One Road" initiative.

Based on this, improving the comprehensiveness and accuracy of China's "Belt and Road Initiative" cross-border reporting is of great significance for enhancing the influence of the initiative and enhancing China's external communication capabilities.

1. Research background

The "One Belt And One Road" initiative was firstly proposed by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013.With the signing of the "One Belt, One Road" memorandum between China and Italy in March 2019, "One Belt, One Road" has once again become a hot topic in China. The implementation of the initiative is based on the joint participation of countries along the "One Belt And One Road" route. However, at present, many other countries' one-sided understanding or even misunderstanding of this initiative proposed by China. For example, "China was imposing high levels of debt on nations in the Asia Pacific to acquire strategic assets or political influence over debtor nations" (from CNN). These misunderstand the purpose and original intention of "One Belt, One Road". Some western countries still view China's peaceful rise in the cold war mentality and power logic.[1]This mentality is bound to be reflected directly or indirectly in mainstream media reports. Therefore, it is crucial to convey the concept and initiative of "One Belt, One Road" to international audience accurately, comprehensively and concretely.

This study takes the Chinese and American mainstream media reports of "One Belt, One Road" as examples, using content analysis method, selecting a total of 30 reports from CNN, CNBC and China

---

[1] Luo Yan. How to tell the story of China in the "One Belt, One Road" international communication[J].News World, 2018(04):70-73.

Daily respectively as subjects, in order to analyse the orientation of reports on the initiative from China's mainstream media and US media. Based on this comparative analysis combining with domestic mainstream media reports to find foreign media's bias and misunderstanding in the "Belt and Road" understanding, it is helpful to prompt more accurate international communication of the initiative, while promote the image of China to be shaped really and objectively.

2. Literature review

The "One Belt, One Road" initiative for external communication research involves several major concepts such as "One Belt, One Road", "Global Communication" and "Outreach". The "One Belt, One Road" is not an entity, but an idea and initiative for cooperative development.[2] Broadly speaking, the definition of "global communication" in the academic circle refers to the exchange and interaction of human information across national borders, including various forms of communication[3]; in a more narrow sense, international communication mainly refers to information dissemination activities across the borders that mainly rely on the government as the main body and rely on the mass media as the main channels. Although "external communication" belongs to the extension of the concept of international communication, there are subtle differences from the narrowly speaking "international communication."

At present, Chinese and foreign research scholars' studies on the dissemination of the "Belt and Road" initiative mainly focus on the suggestions and reflections of international communication path and the problem of Chinese image construction. In general, there are some limitations in the current research status of the "Belt and Road". Most of conclusions drawn by the current research generally focus on the improvement of the talent cultivation mechanism of the mainstream channels of international communication and the macro and meso-level thinking of international communication brand establishment, and lacks analysis on the micro level of how to tell good Chinese stories. Besides, the present research on news data analysis are mainly focus on qualitative analysis, lack of quantitative research support and clear visual display[4].

This study sets the key words selection criteria of content analysis from the perspectives of economy, society and ecological civilization, which is conducive to the objective and comprehensive content analysis of international reports on "One Belt, One Road" initiative.

3. Research design

Considering the authoritativeness and influence of the media and the complexity of data collection, the study chose Chinese official foreign media' China Daily' and the US CNBC and CNN are as the research objects for comparative study. The three media were chosen because CNN and CNBC are the two representative mainstream platforms in America, and the America is an important secondary communication subject of this initiative's external communication, which plays a major role in the international arena, and "China Daily", as an important microphone of China to make the world better know about China, is the representative official English media of China. It is the Chinese newspaper with the highest reprint rate in foreign media and is the most representative among Chinese foreign media.

This study conducted a statistical analysis of the contents of the "Belt and Road" reported by the three media during the three months from March 2019 to May 2019. Firstly, this study describes the statistical characteristics of the three media reports in the three months. The study searches for "the belt and road" in the search fields of the official websites of China Daily, CNBC and CNN, respectively. Excluding content that only contains "Belt and Road" keywords but not related to the

---

[2] Chen jiyin, Yang lian. Research on international communication strategies reported by "One Belt And One Road" of People's Daily (overseas edition) [J]. Education media research,2016(03):12-17.

[3] Cheng Manli.Thoughts on the Construction of International Communication Discourse in China in the New Era[J].International Communication,2018(02):1-7.

[4] Li qianqian, li ying, liu yijun. Analysis of overseas communication proposed by "One Belt And One Road" -- a text mining method based on major international media [J]. Journal of intelligence,2019,38(03):121-126+132.

topic, the number of monthly reports after screening by the three media is counted as shown.
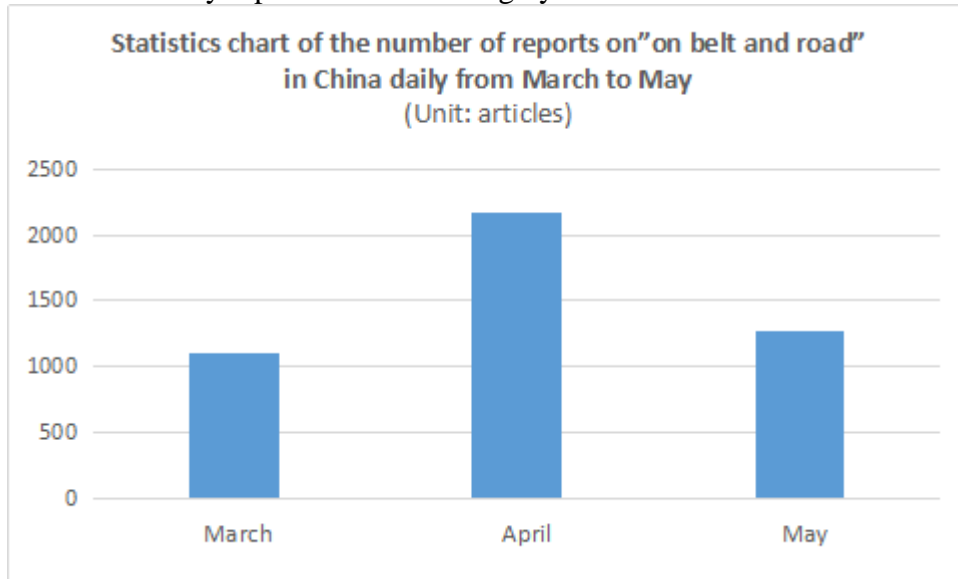
Chart 1 Statistics chart of the number of reports on "one belt and road" in China daily from March to May
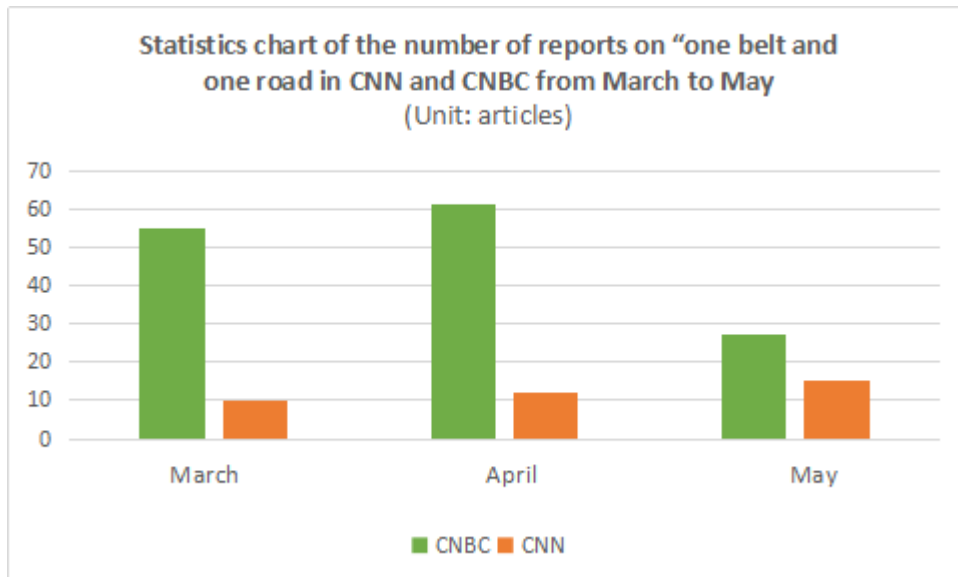
Chart 2 Statistics chart of the number of reports on "one belt and road" in CNN and CNBC from March to May

As for this initiative, China is the first initiator and advocate. The coverage of this initiative accounts for a significant proportion of the total coverage of China's foreign media, and the coverage base is much higher than that of CNN and CNBC. By comparing the number of reports reported by CNBC and CNN, it can be found that CNN pays the least attention to this initiative.

By comparing China Daily and CNBC, it can be found that the number of reports on "One Belt And One Road" peaked in April. CNBC's reports concentrated in late march and April, which was significantly related to the new progress between China and Italy. In addition, CNBC paid great attention to the contents of the newly agreed economic and trade cooperation plan between China and Italy and the possible economic impact, which corresponds to its own media positioning of "global financial media". In CNN's reports, a large number of topics focused on the second ""Belt and Road" International Cooperation Summit Forum" hosted by the Chinese government on April 25, so CNN's reports on this topic was released in late April and May.

Among all selected reports that meet the requirements, 10 text reports were randomly selected from each media for comparative analysis. A total of 30 reports were selected as samples for analysis in the end. The selected 30 samples are summarized as follows:

Media		Serial number	Headline	Date of reports
American media	CNN	1	China is the big winner from Europe's Brexit chaos	2019.3.27
		2	China is becoming an election issue in Asia. And that's bad news for Beijing	2019.4.5
		3	Maldives President who promised to investigate China headed for landslide election win	2019.4.7
		4	China's influence in Africa grows as more young people learn to speak Mandarin	2019.4.11
		5	The US could have a huge say in China's future	2019.4.26
		6	China's billion-dollar Belt and Road party: Who's in and who's out	2019.4.27
		7	Putin seems to pop up wherever there is a political vacuum in the world	2019.4.27
		8	China is watching Western democracy eat itself	2019.4.28
		9	UN boss raises Xinjiang Uyghurs during his trip to China	2019.4.30
		10	China overplayed its hand with Trump on trade, and it could cost them dearly	2019.5.9
	CNBC	1	Italy joining China's Belt and Road project is 'geopolitically unwise,' former prime minister says	2019.3.25
		2	China says Silk Road not geopolitical tool, understands concerns	2019.4.19
		3	China coal investments unpopular in 'new Silk Road' nations	2019.4.24
		4	EU official: China needs to be more transparent about the Belt and Road to get more buy-in	2019.4.25
		5	IMF's Lagarde says China's Belt and Road should only go where sustainable	2019.4.26
		6	Amid criticism, China's Xi says Belt and Road project can be 'shared by the world'	2019.4.27
		7	China puts gentler face on Belt and Road, hits back at critics	2019.4.27
		8	UPDATE 2-China's Xi touts more than $64 bln in Belt and Road deals	2019.4.27
		9	China tackles worries about Belt and Road debt as it notches a Swiss endorsement	2019.5.1
		10	CORRECTED-UPDATE 1-Indonesian 'Belt and Road' high-speed rail link expects $18 bln from satellite towns	2019.5.2
Chinese media	China Daily	1	Paris keen to support Belt, Road Initiative, says ex-prime minister	2019.3.26
		2	China-Italy deal a milestone in cooperation	2019.3.26
		3	Digital Silk Road helping developing countries	2019.4.27
		4	Belt, Road will help connect Asia, Latin America	2019.4.27
		5	Trust is the foundation for Belt and Road cooperation: China Daily editorial	2019.4.29
		6	BRI allows countries to coordinate economic, trade policies	2019.4.30
		7	Belt and Road Initiative: Connecting Europe and China	2019.5.9
		8	BRI charting a new course for Silk Road	2019.5.14
		9	China-Lithuania trade expected to grow under Belt and Road Initiative	2019.5.14
		10	Challenges and opportunities	2019.5.16

Figure 1 Reports chosen from CNN, CNBC and China Daily

4. Research and analysis

According to the actual situation of the 30 reports, this paper will analyze the characteristics of CNN and CNBC's reports on China's "One Belt And One Road" from the perspectives of "report content issues" and "report attitude orientation", and make a comparative analysis with China Daily, which takes China as the main body of report communication.

4.1 Report content analysis

Since this survey research plan quantifies the process of content analysis by extracting keywords and

counting the number of occurrences of keywords and the weighs, in order to make the keyword capture more targeted and representative, this study firstly summarized the agendas of the three media.

Sample report		Chinese media		US media			
		China Daily		CNBC		CNN	
Key words		Frequency (unit: time)	Weight	Frequency (unit: time)	Weight	Frequency (unit: time)	Weight
Economic aspect	Fund	2	0.50%	4	1.10%	8	2.20%
	Finance	4	1.10%	9	2.50%	4	1.10%
	Invest	34	9.40%	24	6.60%	19	5.30%
	Loan	2	0.50%	6	1.70%	9	2.50%
	Debt	1	0.30%	37	10.20%	17	4.70%
	Trade	41	11.40%	10	2.80%	38	10.50%
	Trade war	0	0%	1	0.30%	6	1.70%
	Total	84	23.30%	91	25.20%	101	28.00%
Social aspect	Infrastructure	14	3.90%	20	5.50%	15	4.20%
	High-speed train	2	0.50%	13	3.60%	3	0.80%
	Total	16	4.40%	33	9.10%	18	5.00%
Ecological aspect	Environment	1	0.30%	6	1.70%	1	0.30%
	Green	3	0.80%	7	1.90%	0	0%
	Total	4	1.10%	13	3.60%	1	0.30%

(Note: in order to show the relative frequency of each keyword, the weight of each keyword is calculated after the selected keywords; Weight = frequency of single keyword occurrence/total frequency 361)

Figure 2 Frequency statistics of key words in report content

Through the analysis of the sample reports, it can be found that in the coverage of the theme, American media CNN and CNBC and the Chinese media China Daily both focus on the economic construction of the initiative or its economic impact. In addition, some reports also focused on the impact on social and ecological civilization construction.

In terms of economy, seven key words such as "fund", "finance", "invest", "loan", "debt", "trade" and "trade war" are selected as frequency statistics samples. The most frequently used keywords in China Daily are "trade" and "invest", and CNN and CNBC used "invest", "debt" and "trade" most frequently. This shows that foreign media have realized that promoting trade exchanges and cooperation with relevant countries, and promoting investment and consumption are important components of the initiative. CNN and CNBC's judgment on the importance of "trade" and "investment" basically conforms to the actual focus of the initiative.

However, there are a lot of obvious distortions and misinterpretations in economic aspect of the initiative by CNN and CNBC. For example, the word "debt" has a large proportion in CNN and CNBC, and it even ranks top 1 in CNBC's ranking of economic keywords. A large number of foreign media reported that, "One Belt, One Road" initiative will help the poor countries of the countries along the investment back unable to repay debts, and this is the Chinese to gain a competitive advantage position in the world economy and the project of "plan", and reported that it was a "deliberate" plan by China to gain a competitive advantage in the world economy.

In addition, through the comparative analysis of the keyword "trade war", the attitudinal orientation towards economic aspects of the initiative from CNN and CNBC can be seen clearly. Both CNN and CNBC have raised the issue of "trade wars". A "trade war" in CNBC appeared in "While the United States and China are currently working to end a bitter trade war, they have numerous other areas of disagreement", directly pointed to the opposing differences between China and the United States. In CNN, the "trade war" appeared at a higher frequency, and the economic rivalries and conflicts between China and the United States were even more emphasized.

Compared with CNN, CNBC has paid more attention to the social and ecological aspect of the initiative in its reports, and the understanding of the Chinese initiative is relatively comprehensive. As

one of the typical representatives of China's "infrastructure" construction, "high-speed railway" has made China's "railway construction" have a high degree of attention in foreign media reports and gained high recognition in the international community.

In summary, the Chinese and foreign media have invested a lot of attention in the economic and trade initiatives and the economic impact of the initiative. This is actually consistent with the original intention of the Belt and Road Initiative to promote regional economic cooperation and promote rational allocation of resources. In addition, ecological civilization and social construction are the contents that all countries attach importance to. The positive impact of the initiative on regional infrastructure construction and international ecological environmental protection has been unanimously recognized.

4.2 Report attitude analysis

Through the analysis of the content of 10 reports in each of the three media selected as the sample, this study extracts 30 key words that can reflect the tendency of the report, and each of the 10 keywords representing negative, neutral and positive attitudes.

Sample report		Chinese media		US media			
		China Daily		CNBC		CNN	
Key words		Frequency (unit: time)	Weight	Frequency (unit: time)	Weight	Frequency (unit: time)	Weight
Negative	Hegemony	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.20%
	Danger	1	0.20%	2	0.40%	1	0.20%
	Threat	0	0.00%	1	0.20%	2	0.40%
	Suspect	0	0.00%	2	0.40%	5	1.00%
	Worry	2	0.40%	7	1.40%	11	2.30%
	Objection	1	0.20%	1	0.20%	5	1.00%
	Query	0	0.00%	1	0.20%	1	0.20%
	Criticism	0	0.00%	14	2.90%	23	4.80%
	Condemn	0	0.00%	1	0.20%	2	0.40%
	Trap	1	0.20%	3	0.60%	3	0.60%
	Total	5	1.00%	32	6.60%	54	11.20%

Neutral	Rule	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	5	1.00%
	Competition	9	1.90%	2	0.40%	10	2.10%
	Risk	3	0.60%	5	1.00%	2	0.40%
	Challenge	4	0.80%	1	0.20%	6	1.20%
	Opportunity	13	2.70%	1	0.20%	6	1.20%
	Ally	0	0.00%	4	0.80%	8	1.70%
	Share	1	0.20%	1	0.20%	0	0.00%
	Gain	0	0.00%	0	0.00%	1	0.20%
	Benefit	3	0.60%	3	0.60%	3	0.60%
	Cooperation	51	10.50%	22	4.50%	6	1.20%
	Total	84	17.40%	39	8.10%	47	9.70%
Positive	Partner	14	2.90%	10	2.10%	21	4.30%
	acceptance	0	0.00%	2	0.40%	0	0.00%
	Support	8	1.70%	12	2.50%	13	2.70%
	Promote	14	2.90%	11	2.30%	5	1.00%
	win-win	4	0.80%	3	0.60%	1	0.20%
	Beneficial	1	0.20%	1	0.20%	0	0.00%
	Develop	31	6.40%	16	3.30%	7	1.40%
	Help	9	1.90%	1	0.20%	2	0.40%
	Sustainable	7	1.40%	23	4.80%	2	0.40%
	High-quality	1	0.20%	4	0.80%	1	0.20%
	Total	89	18.40%	83	17.10%	52	10.70%

(Note: in order to show the relative frequency of each keyword, the weight of each keyword is calculated after the selected keywords; Weight = frequency of single keyword occurrence/total frequency 485)

Figure 3 Frequency statistics of key words in attitude

In general, the reports by foreign media, the negative frequency of negative keywords is much higher than that of Chinese media, while the frequency of neutral and positive keywords is significantly lower than that of Chinese media. Among them, the polarization of the use of positive and negative attitude words in CNN the most obvious.

Specifically, in the 10 keywords of negative attitude used by the two American media, "criticism" and "worry" were the most frequently used words. The extensive use of keywords such as "criticism", "suspect", "object" and "doubt" reflects the attempts of western media to highlight the international opposition to China's initiative in their reports. In the reports, there are frequent applications of government officials and research scholars who oppose and suspect the "Belt and Road", or intentionally emphasize or exaggerate some of the obstacles in the international community that are in the international community.

In the use of positive attitude keywords, the Chinese media aims to convey to the international community that the initiative aims to achieve win-win results between China and the "Belt and Road" countries through mutual and regional economic cooperation and enhance the friendship between countries, however, from the positive attitude keywords in the frequency statistics of CNN and CNBC, this agenda has not achieved effective communication effects. Although CNN's use of the key words like "friends"" partners" is obviously relatively frequent, even exceeding the weight of China Daily, it uses "friends"" partners" to describe the intimacy of economic, political, cultural and other contacts between countries, which is different from China Daily. In China Daily, "partners and friends" are used to affirm the positive role of this initiative in promoting friendship and close cooperation among countries.

In addition, the frequency of use of the two keywords "sustainable" and "high-quality" is significantly higher than CNN. "Sustainable" and "high- quality" appear under two scenarios. In CNBC's coverage, CNN has affirmed that "Belt and Road" exists as a long-term initiative, aiming at the sustainable development and high-quality progress of countries along the line. From this perspective, the foreign media has relatively correct grasp of the long-term and macroscopic essence

of the initiative. Besides, CNBC has frequently applied "sustainable" and "high-quality" to the orientation and impact of ecological construction of the initiative. This is in line with CNBC's report on the construction of ecological civilization, which is more closely related to the Chinese media itself.

Among the neutral attitude keywords, although the neutral vocabulary has no obvious emotional orientation, it can still reflect the different tendencies of the media by combining some keywords with the context in which they are used. For example, "cooperation", which is frequently used in China Daily, has a significant decline in the weight of CNBC and CNN reports. China Daily uses "cooperation" to describe the content of the initiative, emphasizing that the implementation of the initiative is a mutual and interactive process, which is intended to demonstrate that the initiative promotes economic cooperation between countries. The goal of mutual connectivity and mutual benefit, but this issue has not achieved good communication effects in foreign media. In US media reports, the use of keywords such as "rulers" and "allies" can reveal their doubts about the Chinese initiative. The "allies" in international relations must be based on political, economic and other interests and cooperation. It emphasizes a kind of alliance between countries. It is different from "friends" and "partners" and can not represent the friendship between countries and countries and is not completely consistent with China's emphasis on not forming alliances with any countries but developing a culture of friendship.

The reason is that with the rising of China in the world, "One Belt, One Road" initiative proposed by China has exerted an increasing influence on the international arena, and the doubts and even hostile attitudes of developed countries on this initiative naturally arise. In addition, the negative tendencies of CNN and CNBC are also due to the stereotypes of other developed countries. The "stereotype" of the national image is bound to be a continuous process. The CNN and CNBC reports also show the old continuations of developed countries' natural doubts and unfriendly stereotypes about developing countries in the media coverage of the New Age China.

5. Conclusion and recommendation

Based on a sample analysis of the China and US mainstream media-China Daily, CNN and CNBC's sample reports on the Belt and Road Initiative, the main conclusions are as follows: The mainstream media of America and China reported on the initiative mainly focus on economics, social culture and ecological civilization, and the three media are in common on the main focus on economic initiatives or economic influence. However, CNBC and CNN have more emphasis on the international influence social culture and ecological environment than China Daily. Among the two American media, CNBC's reports that focus on ecological civilization is particularly obvious, which reflects its more comprehensive understanding of the potential ecological impact of the initiative.

However, China's concentrated and large-scale external coverage of this initiative in the China Daily and other external communication platforms has not changed the negative attitude of the West to China's set. The foreign media's reports on this theme still has obvious negative attitudes due to the rise of China, global competition and the stereotypes of developed countries on China. This negative attitude is reflected in the lack of the overall elaboration of the initiative in media reports, as well as the exaggeration, misunderstanding and even distortion of the challenges and competitions of the countries along the line. On the other hand, this is reflected in the use of keywords with a clear negative tendency in the text of the reports. Compared with the obvious deviation of the economy, in the coverage of infrastructure construction and ecological civilization construction, there are fewer differences of opinion in the media reports between America and China, and the attitudes tend to be consistent.

The economic intercourse between different countries will inevitably involve the fundamental opposition and conflict between capitalism and socialism, and therefore in terms of the economic reports on the "Belt and Road Initiative", whether its selection of the report agenda or the use of the keywords in the content reports, there are obvious differences between the media in America and China. While ecological civilization and social construction do not have much conflicts due to nationality and ideology, the three media have shared concerns about these two aspects.

Through the above, this study proposes targeted reflections and suggestions on the external dissemination of the initiative from the following aspects.

Firstly, it can be found that the current Western media and the public's understanding of the initiative for China still lacks comprehensiveness and connectivity. In the reports, there are frequent questions, misunderstandings or misinterpretations of the content of the initiative. Therefore, China should avoid large-volume, concentrated and fragmented reports in the Belt and Road external communication reports, but improve the content depth and quality of the report, enhancing the continuity and depth of news information and improving the foreign people's comprehensive and accurate understanding.

Secondly, CNBC paid a clear propensity to the ecological civilization construction and potential ecological impact of the initiative, and its attention has even surpassed China Daily. In the follow-up external communication, China should raise the issue of ecological civilization to the same level as economic and social construction, and supplement the ecological civilization content into the external reports. This is conducive to promoting the diversity and multiple display of this initiative in external communication.

Finally, international communication should get rid of the problems of weak audience awareness and lack of pertinence. The characteristics of each country should be carefully studied to achieve accurate communication targeted at different countries and groups[5]. In response to the suspicion, doubt and even hostile attitude of the initiative in Western media reports, Chinese media should pay more attention to and fully understand the current impression of the "One Belt, One Road"from western audiences in order to carry out targeted external communication activities.

References

[1] Luo Yan. How to tell the story of China in the "One Belt, One Road" international communication[J]. News World, 2018(04):70-73.

[2] Chen jiyin, Yang lian. Research on international communication strategies reported by "One Belt And One Road" of People's Daily (overseas edition) [J]. Education media research,2016(03):12-17.

[3] Cheng Manli.Thoughts on the Construction of International Communication Discourse in China in the New Era[J].International Communication,2018(02):1-7.

[4] Li qianqian, li ying, liu yijun. Analysis of overseas communication proposed by "One Belt And One Road" -- a text mining method based on major international media [J]. Journal of intelligence,2019,38(03):121-126+132.

[5] Hu bangsheng. Theoretical transformation and practical transformation of international communication in China [J]. International communication,2016(01):1-9.

---

[5] Hu bangsheng. Theoretical transformation and practical transformation of international communication in China [J]. International communication,2016(01):1-9.