



# A Study on the Discourse Construction of Foreign Mainstream Media's China-Related Reports A Corpus-Based Discourse-Historical Analysis

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**Abstract.** From the perspective of DHA, this paper analyzes the discourse construction of foreign mainstream media's China-related reports based on quantitative corpus analysis. The study selects China-related reports of mainstream media in Japan and the United States as the corpus, and carries out a detailed excavation and analysis of news discourse from three aspects: discourse themes, discursive strategies and language representations. Furthermore, it is found that the media's China-related reports of the two countries cover many topics such as politics, economy and security, which reflects the attention of foreign mainstream media to China in all aspects. At the same time, in the process of reporting, the media of the two countries try to play up the "China threat theory" and stigmatize China through the strategies of nomination, predication, argumentation and perspectivization, thus affecting the positive spread of China's national image overseas.

**Keywords:** DHA · foreign mainstream media · discourse construction · corpus-based

## 1 Introduction

The ideology of news producers and their affiliated organizations will affect the form of language expression in the process of discourse practice, and the interpretation of the discourse construction of news media from the perspective of discourse analysis can dig deeper into the language use, discourse function and discourse intention. At the same time, this perspective has also attracted the attention of current academic circles. Especially in recent years, Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) has been applied to the analysis and deconstruction of news media discourse to explore the ideological significance of news media discourse construction and its manipulation of public opinion

[1–3]. DHA, as one of the main methodologies of discourse analysis, focuses on integrating discourse into historical background for scientific analysis, and advocates discourse analysis from three aspects: discourse themes, discursive strategies and language representations to realize discursive strategies [4, 5].

Based on the above, this study will analyze the discourse themes, discursive strategies and language representations in foreign mainstream media's China-related reports under the research paradigm of DHA and based on corpus text mining. Furthermore, the study will excavate the discourse intention and ideology hidden behind the language uses.

## 2 Data and Methodology

In this study, all the news reports containing China in the headlines of two major mainstream media, Asahi Shimbun and The New York Times, were selected as the corpus during October 2022, that is, one month before and after the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. The corpus was selected from Asahi Shimbun database (Bunzo II Visual) and the official website of The New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com>). The corpus of the two media was respectively 76 articles (more than 85,000 words) and 55 articles (more than 57,000 words). At the same time, KH coder3.0 ① computer aided software is used to analyze the cooccurrence collocation network of high-frequency words in the corpus, so as to provide scientific assistance and verification for qualitative analysis.

DHA is considered to be “interdisciplinary”, which is mainly reflected in the integration of theories and methodologies in various fields and the use of relevant knowledge to analyze text or discourse [6]. Especially, it pays attention to the theme or topic content on the surface of discourse, which coincides with the viewpoint of theme structure in journalism and communication. Therefore, the study uses KH coder 3.0 computer-aided software to analyze the network of high-frequency words and their co-occurrence collocation in Japanese and American news corpus, and obtains the network diagrams of high-frequency words and their co-occurrence collocation as shown in Table 1 and Fig. 1, so as to mine the thematic features of news discourse from the perspective of linguistics.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 Discourse Themes

From Table 1, we can see the top 20 high-frequency words in Asahi Shimbun and The New York Times. In order to observe keywords conveniently, the functional words and pronouns in the corpus are eliminated. It can be found that the words related to “politics (political party, government, political power, etc.)” account for a large proportion in the top 20 high-frequency words in Japanese and the United States news corpus, such as guidance, politics, committee members, political power, policy and system in Asahi Shimbun, and party, country, government and congress in The New York Times. It can be seen that during this period, the mainstream media in Japan and the United States are more concerned about political topics related to China. At the same time, national

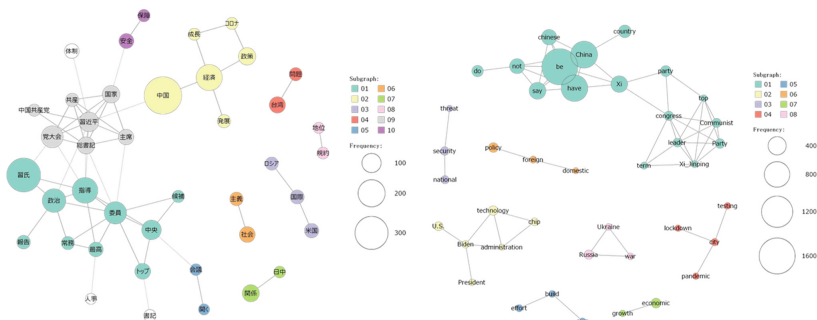
and regional nouns other than China, such as Japan, America, Beijing, United States and Russia, also appear in the top 20 high-frequency words in the news corpus of the two countries. Therefore, the media of the two countries also pay special attention to the relations between countries in the process of reporting on China. In addition, from the high-frequency words economic, it can be seen that economy is also an issue of common concern in the media reports of both countries on China. From the two high-frequency words safety and technology, we can also know that compared with Asahi Shimbun, which is more concerned about the issue of safety, The New York Times pays more attention to topics in the field of science and technology.

From the co-occurrence of high-frequency words in Fig. 1, we can further see the theme content presented by Asahi Shimbun and The New York Times in their reports on China within the limited period. Among them, Asahi Shimbun mainly focuses on China's political and economic policies. At the same time, security issues related to China and the COVID-19 epidemic are also clearly presented in terms of main themes. In addition, Sino-Japanese relationship is also a topic of great concern in Japanese media's reports, and Russia-US relationship is also obviously presented in its reports on China. Similar to Asahi Shimbun, The New York Times reports on China on topics related to politics, economy, security and the epidemic. At the same time, The New York Times also pays more attention to China's foreign policy and the science and technology between China

**Table 1.** Top 20 High Frequency Words in *Asahi Shimbun* and *The New York Times*

Key word	Freq.	Key word	Freq.	Key word	Freq.	Key word	Freq.
中国 (China)	382	政權 (government)	81	China	883	world	121
習氏 (Xi)	312	政策 (policy)	79	say	334	government	118
党 (party)	220	關係 (relationship)	76	Chinese	279	economic	109
經濟 (economy)	182	トップ (leader)	65	party	236	policy	107
指導 (guidance)	176	首相 (Prime Minister)	65	country	185	company	99
政治 (political)	148	政府 (government)	64	make	139	technology	99
党大会 (congress)	129	安全 (safety)	58	people	132	congress	98
米(国) (United States)	120	体制 (system)	57	official	131	power	97
日本 (Japan)	93	最高 (the highest)	55	Beijing	128	Russia	95
委員 (committee)	84	國際 (international)	50	United States	122	Communist	94

(Table is made by the author)



**Fig. 1.** Network diagram of co-occurrence and collocation of high-frequency words in *Asahi Shimbun* and *The New York Times* (Figure is from KH coder 3.0)

and the United States. In addition, unlike *Asahi Shimbun*, which focuses on Russia-US relationship in its China-related reports, *The New York Times* reports on China and related international relations from the perspective of Russia-Ukraine War.

Based on the above analysis, it can be seen that during the month of October 2022, due to the social context of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the mainstream media in Japan and the United States paid more attention to Chinese politics and the policies of the Communist Party of China. However, the mainstream media of the two countries have not only limited their attention to China's political field, but also paid more attention to and reported on economic, security and epidemic issues. Meanwhile, reports on China from the perspective of international relations are particularly prominent. It can be seen that the discourse topics of the China-related reports of the Japanese and American media involve and cover various fields and aspects.

### 3.2 Discourse Strategies and Language Representations

DHA-based discourse analysis focuses on nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and other discursive strategies that involve positive self-representation and negative other representations around the in-group and out-group identity constructions of social actors. These discursive strategies can be manifested through specific language representations. Based on the analysis of discourse themes, this section will explore how the Japanese and the United States mainstream media report on China through discursive strategies on major issues such as politics, economy, and international relations, and thus reveal the real intentions and ideologies of media discourse constructions.

In the process of discourse construction, the media in both countries obviously use nomination strategy (or referential strategy) to create internal and external groups, and then construct and reproduce social actors, such as Examples (1) to (6). The strategy is mainly realized through metonymy and other means of categorization. In particular, *Asahi Shimbun* refers to China's social development path and its world outlook and values in the process of China's modernization through metonymy such as Chinese model and Chinese style. At the same time, combined with the context, the media tries to solidify the negative factors of China's development path and policies in the

audience's mind through such noun phrases with national names. In addition, Asahi Shimbun misnamed the Belt and Road Initiative by using great economics thoughts, which reflected the media's negative cognition and interpretation of it. On the other hand, The New York Times has repeatedly used China's zero Covid to refer to China's epidemic prevention policy, aiming to comment on China's epidemic prevention efforts from a narrow western perspective. At the same time, the media repeatedly used the national term China to refer to Chinese government officials in the reporting process, trying to raise all kinds of problems to the national level, and then trying to stigmatize China.

(1) 途上国ひきつける「中国モデル」(Asahi Shimbun 2022-10-26)

(*The Chinese model that attracts developing countries*)<sup>②</sup>

(2) 人権・安全保障も「中国式」加速 (Asahi Shimbun 2022-10-25)

(Human rights and security will also accelerate under the *Chinese style*)

(3) 中国は巨大経済圏構想「一帯一路」などを通じた経済的な恩恵だけでなく…… (Asahi Shimbun 2022-10-26)

(China has not only benefited from *the Belt and Road, which is the great economic circle initiative*……)

(4) as a more infectious Omicron variant broke through China's zero Covid fortress…… (*The New York Times* 2022-10-28)

(5) China argued that the United States was using North Korea as an excuse to…… (*The New York Times* 2022-10-28)

(6) China suspended climate talks with the United States (*The New York Times* 2022-10-28)

At the same time, through the index analysis of the node word China, it is found that the media of the two countries use a large number of predication strategies to label China in their reports. Among them, Asahi Shimbun tries to build a negative national image through metaphorical expressions such as China's power, China is a competitor and explicit or implicit language representations such as China's actions appear arrogant. Similarly, The New York Times tries to create "China threat theory" and "China dilemma" through metaphorical expressions such as China as a competitor, the China bashing and China's backwardness, as well as verbs with negative attributes such as pushes, has forced and has stuck with. At the same time, through these negative predication strategies cited above, we can see that the media of the two countries have repeatedly strengthened China's negative attributes by the subject of threatening, and then realized the argumentation strategy to legalize the media's own views.

In addition, the media in both countries have used the perspectivization strategy in their reports, integrating their own views into the reports, descriptions, narrations or quotations of related events, such as Examples (7) and (8). In Example (7), Asahi Shimbun describes China from the perspective of the United States through direct reporting, and constructs the "China threat" by borrowing the mouth of the United States. This choice of speaking viewpoint reflects the media's "pro-American" psychological viewpoint and position, and implies the political intention of Japan and the United States to jointly confront China. Besides, the discourse producer directly highlights the content of the direct

report as a trajector at the beginning of the text. Through this word order adjustment, the media tries to arouse the audience's attention to the negative image of China at the beginning and highlight the national image of China as a "competitor". Example (8) is the same as Example (7). *The New York Times* has realized the perspectivization strategy through similar representations, aiming to use the mouth of other countries to build a negative image of China and attract the attention of the audience at the beginning.

(7) 「中国に対する米国の抑止力を維持、強化する必要がある。中国は国際秩序を塗り替える意図と能力を持つ唯一の競争相手だ」。米国防総省で記者会見に臨んだオースティン国防長官は冒頭、こう切り出した。(Asahi Shimbun 2022-10-29)

("There is a need to maintain and strengthen U.S. deterrence against China. China is the only competitor with the intention and ability to change the international order." That's what secretary of defense Austin said at a news conference at the pentagon.)

(8) "When people talk about China, they say, 'Russia is the storm, China is climate change,'" said Thomas Haldenwang, the president of Germany's domestic intelligence agency. (*The New York Times* 2022-10-28).

## 4 Conclusions

Taking the mainstream media of Japan and the United States as examples, this study explores the discourse themes, discursive strategies and language representations in the process of discourse construction of foreign mainstream media reports on China with quantitative and qualitative methods under the path of DHA research. The result shows that foreign media use political, economic, security and even international relations issues as weapons in their China-related reports. At the same time, they use nomination strategy, predication strategy, argumentation strategy, and perspectivization strategy to discredit and distort China's image, which strengthens the negative image of China in overseas audiences' cognition. It can be seen that developed countries with the power of international discourse construct China's national image based on unfriendly concepts such as "China threat theory", "China collapse theory" and "China responsibility theory" for geopolitical considerations [7]. Furthermore, it has a negative impact on China's dissemination of Chinese voice on the international stage and shaping a good national image.

### Note

① KH Coder3.0 is a text data mining tool, which can analyze word frequency, co-occurrence and correlation of Japanese, English and other language texts.

② All the translations in the study were translated by the author.

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