

Discourse Analysis of Western Mainstream Media's China-Related Reports from a Discourse-Historical Analysis Perspective: A Case Study Based on *Cross-cultural International Communication English Course* (2022) Edited by Liu Moxiao and Rao Qiaoying

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Abstract: Public English courses in mainland Chinese universities have evolved from static cross-cultural comparison (cross-cultural communication) to face-to-face intercultural communication, and now focus on international communication. This study uses eight unabridged original news reports reflecting Western mainstream media's ideological perspectives on China from *Cross-cultural International Communication English Course* published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2022 as corpus. By combining Van Dijk's ideological theory and Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical analysis method, this research conducts secondary qualitative analysis on the linguistic level, complementing the textbook's focus on communication theory concepts. Through close reading of how Western major media construct China's national image through discourse strategies such as nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation strategies, this study aims to cultivate contemporary college students' critical reading ability of news texts, understand Western news discourse production mechanisms, identify implicit biases and ideologies, and reflect on how we should use Western theories to argue China's position.

Keywords: Historical discourse analysis, cross-cultural international communication course, Western media, national image, discourse construction.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, China's comprehensive national strength and international status have significantly improved, becoming the world's second-largest economy. While international attention to China is unprecedented, we still face severe challenges in cross-cultural exchange and international communication. The "Western strong, Chinese weak" pattern in international public opinion has not fundamentally changed, and we still face the practical problem of "having truth but unable to speak it out" when confronting Western misunderstandings and prejudices (Liu & Rao, 2022). Targeting the pain points and difficulties in China's international communication, Beijing Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press published *Cross-cultural International Communication English Course* edited by Liu Moxiao and Rao Qiaoying in August 2022. This textbook innovatively develops "foreign language + media" new liberal arts teaching materials, integrating university public

English language teaching and media communication concept learning through analysis of selected negative news reports about China from Western mainstream media using communication terminology. The author's institution has conducted two semesters of teaching using this textbook, which breaks from the previous singular mode of cross-cultural differences comparison or face-to-face intercultural communication conflicts, turning toward understanding contemporary Western media communication discourse practices. This shift is beneficial for cultivating college students' cross-cultural argumentation awareness of "using your reasoning to argue my position" from a long-term perspective. China's image cannot rely solely on passive "other-construction" but requires more "self-construction."

The highlight of this textbook is its analysis of common news communication strategies in Western mainstream media's China-related reports: false balance, media framing theory, agenda-setting theory, confirmation bias, double standards, labeling theory, stigmatization, and out-of-context photos. However, the language analysis of each case excerpt lacks a unified discourse analysis framework and appears scattered. While macro news communication theory perspectives need to be combined with micro news discourse analysis to understand how news tendencies are generated (Zhuang & Chen, 2024). Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical analysis method is an effective approach for analyzing political discourse and can theoretically serve as a powerful supplement to this textbook. This study attempts to use the five major discourse construction strategies in discourse-historical analysis nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization, and intensification/mitigation strategies to conduct a secondary qualitative analysis under a unified framework of various Western media's China-related news report excerpts in the textbook, to further reveal how national image is constructed by Western media and guide contemporary college students to gain insight into Western China-related reports' characteristics of appearing objective and fair while actually conveying subjective meanings (especially ideological tendencies).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As international communication evolves, discourse increasingly serves not only to reflect but to construct ideological and cultural perspectives. Western media's portrayals of China significantly influence global public opinion, revealing embedded rhetorical strategies and biases. The use of discourse-historical analysis (DHA) offers a powerful framework to decode such narratives, linking theory with practice. In this context, the Cross-cultural International Communication English Course provides valuable case studies for examining these dynamics.

2.1 Academic Definition of Communication and Overview of Representative China-related News Cases in *Cross-cultural International Communication English Course*

Propaganda is "a systematic attempt to influence specific target audiences' emotions, attitudes, opinions and actions through true or false one-sided messages for ideological, political and commercial purposes, using mass and direct media channels" (Nelson, Richard Alan, 1996, cited in Guo, 2020). International communication research that emerged during World War II continued the propaganda research tradition communication is an upgraded, improved, and expanded version of propaganda. Communication studies represent the most concentrated manifestation of propaganda modernization, where the explicitness of intent, depth of symbols, and sophistication of rhetoric can all affect propaganda effectiveness. The United States is the "original family" of communication studies; in the practical transformation from propaganda to communication, the United States is also an expert. When studying the discourse changes in external propaganda, the American experience provides a good sample (Guo, 2020).

Western journalism, driven by various interests and value and ideological orientations, often rhetorically and strategically processes facts. However, Chinese people generally lack proper understanding and sensitivity to the rhetorical nature of Western media discourse (Liu, 2004). Western rhetoric emphasizes that through rhetorical means and techniques, persuaded audiences often "accept" the rhetorician's views and change their own views and attitudes unconsciously, that is, without awareness of these means (Liu, 2004).

Fu and Yuan (2017) also pointed out the constructive and productive role of discourse in international relations, where discourse constructs "self" and "other" in the process of giving meaning to the "objective" world. Political psychology has also confirmed the constructive role of discourse through experimental methods, where experimenters can change people's cognition of behavioral subject images by manipulating texts with different praise and criticism, thus constructing different political realities.

Cross-cultural International Communication English Course (Liu & Rao, 2022), published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press for second-year undergraduate public English in mainland Chinese universities, selected reports from: The New York Times' coverage of Chinese meat consumption affecting global emission reduction (2021), poverty alleviation (2020), double standards in reporting on China/Italy's pandemic lockdowns (2020); CNN's coverage of China's Winter Olympics (2022); BBC's coverage of China's climate response strategies; The Guardian's attribution of UK's energy crisis to China (2022); and an Australian think tank's report on China's Belt and Road projects in Africa (2019), as teaching cases to teach basic news communication concepts. However, the textbook's qualitative language analysis of each case text still lacks a unified theoretical framework. This study attempts to conduct close reading of these eight Western major media China-related news reports' unabridged original texts according to Van Dijk's media discourse ideology theory, using Ruth Wodak's discourse-historical analysis method as the analytical framework, to analyze how Western journalists construct China's national image through nomination, predication, argumentation, perspectivization and intensification/mitigation strategies.

2.2 Discourse-Historical Analysis

In recent years, discourse-historical analysis (DHA) has been continuously applied to media discourse analysis. Both domestic and international scholars have conducted extensive research using DHA. International DHA research mainly focuses on controversial immigrant and racist discourse (van Leeuwen et al., 1999; Reisigl et al., 2001; Wodak, 2001), climate change (Reisigl et al., 2009) and other public space discourse, as well as research applying it to national image and identity construction discourse (Wodak et al., 2009; Wodak, 2011; Unger, 2013). Results show that DHA plays an important role in shaping national identity. Domestic scholars focus on its application in newspaper, television and other media reports and political speeches by national leaders. Dong (2018) studied mainstream Italian media's coverage of the Belt and Road Initiative, finding that media coverage was generally positive on economic aspects while occasionally expressing concerns on political aspects. Fu (2022) used DHA method to examine how the State Council's *Government Work Report* foreign publicity from 2014-2018 constructed the central government's in-group subject image as people-friendly yet authoritative, specifically manifesting images of serving the people, pragmatic work, simplicity and responsibility. Hu and Li (2023) used DHA and corpus-based approaches to discuss similarities and differences in how Chinese and American mainstream media construct legitimization in trade friction discourse. Zhao and Wang (2024) used DHA to analyze the construction strategies of "sustainable development discourse" in Japan's 2023 *Environmental White Paper*. Gao and Huang (2024) analyzed through DHA that the 2022 *U.S. National Defense Strategy Report* reflects the U.S.'s adherence to hegemonism ideology and zero-sum game concept.

3. INTRODUCTION TO VAN DIJK'S IDEOLOGICAL SQUARE AND RUTH WODAK'S DISCOURSE-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS METHOD

Van Dijk (1991) deeply revealed the ideology behind media texts through detailed text analysis and context consideration in his article "Opinion and Ideology in Media." Ideological discourse is mainly implemented in the polarization strategy of "Us VS Them", namely positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation. Behind this lies the evaluative structure following the principle of maximizing "our" interests, also known as the "ideological square":

- (1) Emphasize our good properties/actions (2) Emphasize their bad properties/actions
- (3) Mitigate our bad properties/actions (4) Mitigate their good properties/actions

In the entire self-serving strategy of ideology, the above square is expressed in vocabulary choices implying positive or negative evaluations and in the structure of entire propositions and their analogies (active/passive, etc.). (Van Dijk, 1991, cited from *Approaches to Media Discourse*, 2016:34)

Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA) is a research paradigm formed by Ruth Wodak and her Vienna team in the process of analyzing European anti-Semitic discourse (Yang & Fu, 2018). DHA focuses on building conceptual frameworks for analyzing political discourse. DHA has four steps when analyzing discourse: identifying specific content or themes of particular discourse (such as those containing racism, anti-Semitism, nationalism, etc.); analyzing discourse strategies (including argumentation strategies); exploring linguistic forms; and exploring linguistic manifestations of discriminatory stereotypes (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). DHA focuses on five discourse strategies involving positive self and negative other presentation, namely nomination strategies, predication strategies, argumentation strategies, perspectivization strategies and

intensification/mitigation strategies (Wodak, 2009). These discourse strategies aimed at constructing in-groups and out-groups are the basis for inclusion/exclusion and identity construction justification/legitimization (Wodak, 2009, cited from Zhao & Wang, 2024).

4. ANALYSIS OF WESTERN MEDIA COVERAGE DISCOURSE STRATEGIES AND CONSTRUCTED NATIONAL IMAGE UNDER DHA FRAMEWORK

Wodak (2009a) points out that discourse construction requires the use of some discourse strategies. Strategy generally refers to a more or less precise and intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) for achieving particular social, political, psychological or linguistic aims. Analysis of discourse strategies is one of the core elements of discourse-historical analysis method. Through detailed text analysis and context consideration, it deeply reveals the ideology behind media texts. Ideological discourse is mainly implemented in the polarization strategy of "Us VS Them", and the main cognitive function of ideology is to form specific group attitudes.

4.1 Nomination Strategies

Nomination strategies in historical discourse analysis refer to strategies for constructing and representing social actors through creating in-groups and out-groups. Nomination strategies are accomplished through various categorization means, including metaphor, metonymy and synecdoche. The naming of social actors can be positive or negative, appreciative or derogatory. Nomination strategies focus on membership categorization, especially in-groups and out-groups, realized through demonstrative pronouns, verbs and nouns used to express processes and behaviors, etc. (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009).

[Example 1] Use of demonstrative pronouns

The most active force in communication practice is advertisers and other commercial marketers (Guo, 2020). The first unit of the textbook takes a failed cross-cultural advertising copy as an example (Taking "Eating with Chopsticks" Dolce & Gabbana Advertisement (2018) as Example).

Episode 2: "Today, what we are going to eat is a traditional Sicilian cannolo...This will make you feel like you are in Italy, but you are actually in China!"

The narration continuously uses the second person "you" to refer to Chinese models and Chinese audiences, highlighting the in-group/out-group member distinction between "I" and "you", failing to create emotional resonance with the audience and resulting in a counterproductive advertising effect. It reveals the arrogance and ignorance of the Italian brand, still stuck in past "Chinatown stereotypes."

[Example 2] Referential substitution for China in The New York Times' poverty alleviation coverage:

"In simply 5 years, China says it has lifted from excessive poverty over 50 million farmers left behind by breakneck financial progress in cities. But the village, certainly one of six in Gansu visited by The New York Times without government oversight, can be a testament to the appreciable price of the ruling Communist Party's method to poverty alleviation. That method has relied on large, presumably unsustainable subsidies to create jobs and construct higher housing." Title: "Jobs, Houses and Cows: China's Costly Drive to Erase Extreme Poverty" Source: The New York Times 2020

Mr. Liu Jianqiang points out: "When American journalists report on China, constrained by their own ideology, they often first set frames like 'this Communist country,' 'Beijing's Communist regime,' 'authoritarian state' and other words with strong ideological prejudice. These types of vocabulary most easily trigger American public's antipathy toward China. Mr. Zhao Xinshu's field experiment on ordinary American people in 2004 found that Americans harbor strong hostility toward the term 'China's Communists,' with hostility levels only slightly lower than toward 'Al-Qaeda members,' while having no hostility toward the terms 'Chinese people' and 'Chinese leaders.' Politicians, diplomats, commentators, and media personnel in English-speaking countries are certainly well aware of the negative connotations represented by the word 'Communist.' So when they want to disparage China, they often casually throw out this word."

[Example 3] Use of process and behavior nouns with negative emotions in The New York Times' coverage of Wuhan's lockdown during the pandemic

"And it has begun trying to promote its efforts as successful in propaganda at home and abroad." Source: NYT report on China's lockdown policy 2020/3/8

The dynamic phrase for publicity should be "give publicity to"; as native English-speaking American journalists certainly understand the negative connotations of "propaganda", The New York Times' persistent use of "propaganda" to translate "publicity" in China-related reports can only be explained as intentional mistranslation based on ideological prejudice. During World War II, the word "propaganda" became notorious for being defined as a synonym for "spreading deceptive messages and coercive views" (Guo, 2020).

[Examples 4, 5] Western media's use of novel metaphors achieves stigmatization of Chinese actions.

Media reports' deliberate use of novel metaphors can serve to lead agenda-setting. It shows how Western media represented by the United States is adept at using this strategy to stigmatize China. Because once audiences accept a metaphor, it's equivalent to "implanting" that framework in their brains, and they will inevitably observe the world and think about issues according to this framework.

The U.S. government and media use their powerful agenda-setting and leadership capabilities to "lead" other Western media in launching "public opinion warfare" against China globally. This can be corroborated by cases listed in the textbook.

[Example 4] Nouns expressing processes and behaviors "In reality, the BRI has already turned into a Chinese neocolonialist project." Source: the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank

[Example 5] Verbs expressing processes and behaviors "In fact, the BRI is trapping numerous countries in unsustainable levels of **debt**." Source: the Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank

"There are two ways to conquer and enslave a country. One is by the sword. The other is by debt." famous saying by John Adams, second U.S. President. Brahma Chellaney, Professor of Strategic Studies at the New Delhi-based Center for Policy Research, was the first to assimilate the large Chinese loans to a debt-trap diplomacy (2017).

The New York Times and The Washington Post also set similar agendas, with "China's version of the Marshall Plan" appearing multiple times in reports, describing the Belt and Road Initiative as China's Marshall Plan (Liu, 2023).

Western media's combined use of different novel metaphors like "Debtbook Diplomacy", "Trojan Horse" etc., all point to stigmatizing China's Belt and Road infrastructure construction projects in African countries as **neocolonialism**, thus forming another "Gestalt circuit" that uses symbolic means to influence audiences' cognition, attitudes, and behaviors within the macro context. However, in fact, "Quite a lot of the remaining debt is to Western countries and particularly Western private lenders" (Donnelly, 2018). The African debt is not the prerogative of China. China's debtbook diplomacy or debt-trap diplomacy is not entirely responsible for Africa's growing risk of over-indebtedness (Eom, Brautigam, & Benabdallah, 2018).

Similarly, Fu and Yuan (2017) analyzed the constructive and productive role of discourse in international relations, where discourse constructs "self" and "other" in the process of giving meaning to the "objective" world. Harvard University Professor Graham Allison proposed the "Thucydides Trap" in 2012, mapping the source domain "The real cause of war was the growth of Athenian power and the fear this caused in Sparta" onto the target domain of China-US relations. In the metaphorical context of the "Thucydides Trap", metaphors like "China's rise", "America's decline", "zero-sum game", and "power transition" form a network supporting and activating the "Thucydides Trap" cognitive framework, also constituting the "Gestalt circuit" of this framework.

[Example 6] "China's appetite for energy is always a key driver of global market prices." Source: theguardian.com Headline: What caused the UK's energy crisis?

The food metaphor implies China's desires; while "appetite" seems neutral, in context it easily leaves readers with an image of greediness.

4.2 Predication Strategies

Wodak (2009a) points out that predication strategies can be manifested linguistically in the form of predicative structures with evaluative functions, expressing negative or positive attributes through explicit or implicit predicates. Linguistic predicative structures can assign characteristics to social actors as individuals, group members, or entire groups. Predication strategies aim to label social actors positively or negatively, thus closely related to nomination strategies. The main

realization forms include explicit predicates or predicative nouns, adjectives and pronouns, as well as allusions, presuppositions, implications, similes, and metaphors (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:94).

[Example 7] "To satisfy its record-demand for gas, China's import of gas via super-chilled tankers was expected to **surge** by almost a fifth." Source: theguardian.com Headline: What caused the UK's energy crisis?

In The Guardian's report attributing London's 2021 power shortage crisis to China's oil imports, water metaphors were used to describe China's economic strength. "Surge" originally meant "waves surging", here meaning "rapid increase."

[Example 8] "In simply 5 years, China says it has lifted from excessive poverty over 50 million farmers left behind by **breakneck** financial progress in cities." Title: "Jobs, Houses and Cows: China's Costly Drive to Erase Extreme Poverty" Source: The New York Times 2020

"Poverty alleviation" has different near-synonym expressions like "reduce poverty", "erase poverty", "shake off poverty", "alleviate poverty", "end poverty", etc. But this news report chose "lift from poverty." In Western audiences' eyes, "lift out of poverty" highlights the image of an Eastern authoritarian government.

National Public Radio (NPR) once pointed out that the verb "lift" makes people imagine a scene where the government's big hands carefully pick up poor people from dilapidated earthen houses and place them in new homes with modern facilities in towns.

For example: "China has lifted 700 million people out of poverty [through more than 30 years of reform and opening-up]." For the same content, NPR articles prefer to use expressions like: "Around 700 million Chinese have worked their way above the poverty line since 1980." The British Guardian's attitude and wording are more intense: "The trope that hundreds of millions have been 'lifted out' of poverty is wrong and insulting; they have hauled themselves out." Western mainstream media's disapproval of the expression "lift out of poverty" reflects two different ways of thinking and social systems. American society emphasizes the role of "individuals", and its political system design tends toward "small government", guarding against government overreach.

[Example 9] "With a country's destiny thus **chained** to Beijing's wits, accusations of Chinese 'neocolonialism' are rising-not surprising given Beijing's scramble for Africa."

Predication strategies are closely related to nomination strategies (Wodak, 2009a). In the intra-textual context where macro propositions like neocolonialism carry negative evaluations, the locally positioned "scramble" directly associated with China's national role conveys the communicative meaning of posing threats to others after power expansion, further promoting the China threat theory.

The Economist's March 9th 2019 cover story title was "The new scramble for Africa." "Scramble" means "to compete for something in a disorganized way." It usually occurs in situations of scarce resources, for example, when everyone is scrambling to buy limited edition products, creating a chaotic scene where everyone is trying to get what they want. In the 19th century, European powers divided up the African continent, historically known as "The Scramble for Africa." Through time-space displacement, combined with this metonymic allusion, it triggers readers' negative associations about China's Belt and Road construction projects in Africa.

[Example 10] "It is clear that the West has neglected Africa as its former sphere of influence and has lost ground to Beijing."

"Lose ground to" is a metaphor full of gunpowder smell, rendering "confrontational discourse."

Almost all news media use metaphors to varying degrees to express positions and shape object images. When reading news, readers are not only influenced by agenda-setting but also unconsciously receive value information in metaphorical rhetoric (Xu, Tang & Yan, 2020).

4.3 Argumentation Strategies

Arguments can be seen as part of argumentation, belonging to mandatory, explicit or inferable premises that prove the transition from arguments to conclusions is reasonable. Arguments mainly include 15 forms of manifestation: useful/beneficial, useless/worthless, definition, danger and threat, humanitarian, justice, responsibility, burden and encumbrance, financial, reality, numbers, law and rights, history, culture, and abuse. If the argumentation scheme is fallacious, it is called a fallacy (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:110).

Unit 4 of the textbook compared The New York Times' official Twitter news report excerpts criticizing China's Wuhan lockdown measures released at 10:30 AM on March 8, 2020, and news report excerpts praising Italy's Milan lockdown action released at 10:50 AM the same day, finding typical double standards in the same lockdown reporting.

[Example 11] First paragraph: "To fight the coronavirus, China placed nearly 60 million people under lockdown and instituted strict quarantine and travel restrictions for hundreds of millions of others. Its campaign has come **at great cost** to **people's** livelihoods and **personal liberties**." (China)

[Example 12] First paragraph: "Breaking News: Italy is locking down Milan, Venice and much of its north, risking its economy **in an effort to** contain Europe's worst coronavirus outbreak. The restriction **affect** Milan and the regions that serve as Italy's **economic engine**,---" (Italy)

First, Example (1) in the report on China's Wuhan lockdown first paragraph adopted a threat argument (criticizing China for violating people's freedom). The danger or threat argument indicates that if a political action or decision will produce specific dangerous or threatening consequences, it should not be taken or implemented (Wodak, 2001:75). In the report on China's Wuhan, The New York Times intentionally used "60 million people" as metonymy to refer to "Wuhan", indicating China locked down 60 million people; implemented home quarantine and travel restrictions for hundreds of millions of others, then concluded that the lockdown came at great cost to people's lives and freedom (the predication strategy used the negative evaluation of "at great cost to"). This proposition strategy triggered Westerners' most sensitive nerves of "human rights and freedom." "Freedom" is one of the highest universal values that people may even sacrifice life and love for. It creates rhetorical impact on Western audiences emotionally, psychologically, and ideologically. It associates China's "Wuhan lockdown" for fighting the epidemic with "human rights" issues.

In contrast, the first paragraph of the Italy lockdown report (Example 2) adopted a responsibility argument (praising Italy for fighting the epidemic at the cost of economic losses), which indicates that because a country or group is responsible for the emergence of a specific problem, they should take action to seek ways to solve the problem (Wodak, 2001:75). It points out that Italy is taking action to lock down Milan, Venice and most of northern Italy, in an effort to (the predication strategy used "in an effort to") contain COVID-19. In the report on Italy, the words "people" and "liberty" were not mentioned at all. Italy was shaped as the image of a savior preventing the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic. And Milan region was metaphorically compared to Italy's economic engine, which is a positive mechanical metaphor.

4.4 Intensification/Mitigation Strategies

Intensification/mitigation strategies can manipulate the expression of propositions by intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of discourse to modify the cognitive state (Wodak, 2009a). Linguistic means of intensification strategies include intensifying markers such as intensifying adverbs (like very, too, absolutely), intensifying morphemes (like super-, mega-), hyperbolic quantity words and intensifying verbs (especially modal verbs), as well as verb phrases, adjectives and adverbs that encode speakers' emotions, feelings, moods and overall tendencies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). Linguistic means of mitigation strategies include subjunctive mood, euphemisms, hedges, tag questions, etc. (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001).

Intensification strategies:

[Example 13] "Italy's government early Sunday took the **extraordinary step** of locking down---. And **sacrificing** the Italian economy in the short term to **save** it in the long term."

The New York Times used intensifying verbs encoding speaker emotions (save), extraordinary, sacrifice and other positive words in concentrated combination to positively praise Italy Milan's lockdown action.

[Example 14] "To satisfy its **record-demand** for gas, China's import of gas via **super**-chilled tankers was expected to surge by almost a fifth."

To highlight China's competition with Europe for oil resources, the report used record-demand, and the intensifying morpheme super-.

[Example 15] "Beijing says its **heavy-handed measures** are working."

Heavy-handed = being too forceful or too rough. It is a negative word emphasizing ruthlessness or high-pressure tactics; using this word to describe Wuhan's epidemic lockdown implies that the Chinese government is a regime that maintains rule through high-pressure means.

In addition to these adjectives with positive/negative connotations, all seven Western China-related news reports in the textbook frequently used hyperbolic quantity words to describe China to increase Western readers' sense of unease. According to Guo (2020), postmodern public opinion hotspots are fleeting, and postmodern masses do not believe in certain truths. Many contemporary communicators do not strive to make audiences believe "facts", but only need to make the data look convincing. Creating a sense and effect of reality is considered achieving the goal of communication.

[Example 16] "Today, China consumes 28% of the world's meat, including half of all pork."

[Example 17] "While China's tens of billions of investments and loans are greedily gobbled up by cash-starved African states,--"

[Example 18] "China placed nearly 60 million people under lockdown and instituted strict quarantine and travel restrictions for hundreds of millions of others."

Mitigation strategies: The news discourse in the textbook frequently used a type of semantic transfer mitigation strategy (Van Dijk, 1991) in China poverty alleviation reports. For example "I'm not against black people, but----"; The first clause emphasizes the speaker's tolerance, while what follows after "but" (usually also the rest of the text) may be very negative. This specific strategy of semantic transfer aims to accurately manipulate opinions and ideology, with disclaimers serving as strategic preambles to the negative parts of the text (Van Dijk, 1995, from *Approaches to Media Discourse*, 2016). The communication terminology in the textbook calls it false balance.

[Example 19] "The village of Jieyuan is one of many successes---**But** the village, one of six in Gansu visited by The New York Times without government oversight, is also a testament to the considerable cost."

[Example 20] "**We're fairly certain** China's eradication of absolute poverty in rural areas has been profitable — **given** the sources mobilized, **we're much less certain** it's sustainable or price efficient", stated Martin Raiser, the World Bank country director for China.

[Example 21] "**While** the poverty alleviation program has helped millions of poor people, critics point to **the campaign's rigid definition**."

4.5 Perspectivization Strategies

Perspectivization strategies mainly examine the similarities and differences in the use of message sources (specific and definite, implicit and indefinite, and unmentioned) and quotation methods (direct quotes and indirect quotes) (Hu & Li, 2023).

For news discourse, indirect speech is the "standard" form of quotation. To create a sense of objectivity and fairness, commentators strive to explain principles and persuade readers in a third-person, i.e., "impersonal" tone, thereby expressing their own views and attitudes (Gao, 2016). All seven news reports in the textbook used quoted speech, and the quotation methods tended to be diverse. Experts and scholars became commonly used authoritative information sources in news reports.

[Example 22] "We're fairly certain China's eradication of absolute poverty in rural areas has been profitable — given the sources mobilized, we're much less certain it's sustainable or price efficient", stated **Martin Raiser, the World Bank country director for China**.

B. Non-explicit message sources (US): Refers to speech emitters described by indefinite noun phrases, or plural forms, or co-referential pronouns with unidentified identities used in context.

[Example 23] "You can't do anything on climate change unless you bring China with you" says **a professor of humanities and social sciences at Australia's La Trobe University**.

[Example 24] "While the poverty alleviation program has helped millions of poor people, critics point to the campaign's right definitions."

C. Unidentifiable message sources (AS): Refers to when reporters either do not know the exact message source, or consider the source less important than the facts they want to report, or intentionally conceal the source, thus using passive voice or vague expressions in the report. In journalism, this category is often called "anonymous source."

[Example 25] "**Inevitable questions** swirl over whether some families have used personal ties to local officials to qualify for grants---." Source: The New York Times 2020 "Jobs, Houses and Cows: China's Costly Drive to Erase Extreme Poverty"

Examples 24 and 25 served agenda-setting functions, effectively influencing which facts and opinions people pay attention to by providing information and arranging relevant topics.

5. CONTEXT ANALYSIS OF NEGATIVE CHINA IMAGE CONSTRUCTION IN WESTERN MAINSTREAM MEDIA'S CHINA-RELATED REPORTS

Historical and cultural context: Although Christianity in Europe has degenerated into a spiritual symbol rather than a mode of production, the concept of pagans has transformed into a fixed thinking pattern affecting political and cultural narratives. If they cannot find others or enemies, Western politics seems to lose its compass, even losing passion and motivation. Carl Schmitt (1996) profoundly explained this political concept based on identifying friends and enemies and living in eternal struggle. Whether it is Hobbes's jungle hypothesis or Huntington's clash of civilizations theory, these struggle concepts all manifest friend-enemy politics (Zhao, 2016:5).

Political macro context: The struggle for international discourse power continues in the Internet era. On November 23, 2016, the European Parliament passed the "EU Strategic Communication to Counter Third Party Propaganda" resolution; on December 3, then U.S. President Obama signed the "Portman-Murphy Counter-Propaganda Act." These two legislative activities both claimed to target the "threats" from Russia and China, showing the Western world's "new Cold War" thinking (Guo, 2020). U.S. President Biden emphasized in the *U.S. National Security Report (2022)* that China is "the only country with both the intent to reshape the international order and increasingly the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to do so" (cited from Gao & Huang, 2022).

Situational context: Under the guidance of "imagined enemy" thinking defining China-Russia and other major powers' propaganda as "sharp power", U.S. foreign propaganda policy and strategy have shown signs of returning to "jungle law" hard power. U.S. foreign propaganda is fundamentally a type of political communication, aimed at national interests and international politics. U.S. foreign communication is not becoming increasingly gentle and friendly; rather, it is becoming more flexible and clever (Guo, 2020).

Obviously, American mainstream media's image construction of China will be influenced by factors such as American hegemonism and America First (Zhang, 2022).

6. CONCLUSION

Liu Yanmeng (2004:21) points out that if a country's cross-cultural communication research and education focuses on practical needs and achieves significant results, then this country's external publicity will inevitably show corresponding vitality and effectiveness as the entire society's cross-cultural communication level improves. However, if external publicity effects remain poor for a long time, then a profound, systematic, and theory-intensive reflection on international discourse communication becomes inevitable. It can be said that Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press's *Cross-cultural International Communication English Course (2022)* provides representative Western news communication case materials for such reflection.

This study conducted close reading of eight original news reports selected by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press's *Cross-cultural International Communication English Course (2022)* that represent Western media's ideological dialogue with China, from a historical-discourse analysis framework. This helps cultivate college students' critical thinking in reading news discourse, and also aims to narrow the "generational gap" in rhetoric with the West, enhancing contemporary college students' rhetorical awareness when considering, planning and executing various China-West exchanges.

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