

The Images of China in *TIME*: A Corpus-Based Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

With the help of corpus statistics, this article compares the China-related covers and reports of *TIME* over its 100 years of existence and divides them into four periods. As a real-time political news publication, *TIME* has the characteristic of closely matching the development of the times. In different historical periods, China's image, China-related cover characters and headlines, and the content of China-related reports vary greatly. The image and report on wartime China are more objective and positive, with a more positive tone. In the Redified China phase, the China-related reports were mainly negative, trying to create a chaotic and bloody image of Communist China for Western readers. In the reforming or Changing phase of China, the coverage shifted from the negative terms to a neutral and objective one, unfolding China's change and development to the Western world. While in the diversified development phase of China, China-related cover stories and terms on *TIME* were more objective. The characters and images that *TIME* tries to highlight were also inconsistent in different historical periods, indicating that the shaping of *TIME*'s China cover image is deeply influenced by the ideology, news values, culture, and worldview differences of the reporters.

Keywords: *TIME*, China-related cover and report, critical discourse analysis, image

1. Introduction

The image of the nation is the expression and symbol of the nation's strength and national spirit and is also a comprehensive system of the external and internal public judgment of a nation itself, its behavior, and its achievements (Guan, 1999, p. 23). Generally speaking, the image of a country consists of three parts: the image in the eyes of other governments; the image in the eyes of the public; and the image in the media of other countries. In the information age, mass media plays an extremely important role in shaping and disseminating the image of the state, and coupled with the political and economic competition between countries, it makes the shaping of a country's national image a primary target for attacks by hostile countries or countries with different ideologies. With the help of the media, the public learns about and makes judgments about the image of other countries. According to Almond (2007), if the public lacks direct experience with a topic, their understanding of the topic depends largely on the relevant reports in the news media and international publications, and the resulting "misconceptions" about a country's image become a serious problem in the field of international communication, and it can lead to serious consequences for the national image and international relations of other countries.

TIME was founded in March 1923 by Henry Robinson Luce and Briton Hadden to keep the American public informed of national and international news once a week, and the cover illustrations were mainly used to indicate the week's important news stories (Lehnus, 1980, p. 5). As one of the most influential and largest weekly news magazines in the United States, *TIME* ranks among the top three news magazines in the United States in terms of turnover and circulation, and is known as the world's "history library". *TIME*'s readers are mostly middle-class intellectuals, especially those engaged in international politics. It has greatly influenced the ideology and value system of the American elite and reflects the ideology and value system of these classes. As the voice of the Western mainstream media, *TIME* plays an important role in shaping the image of other nations. The cover story is one of the highlights of *TIME*, and newsworthiness is one of the criteria for being a *TIME* cover personality. The cover of *TIME* has always been the face of the world, and a cover often symbolizes an event, a trend, or an idea. Since the founding of *TIME*, news stories about China and Chinese figures on its cover have been common, and the combing and statistics of these cover stories can provide a glimpse of the people and themes of China

over time's 100-year history. In a way, *TIME*'s cover story reports on China are representative samples of the image of China constructed by the Western world, and the study of these cover characters and their corresponding news stories is extremely useful for understanding the way the Western media shape the image of China and its implied ideology.

2. Background Information

Being a branch of applied linguistics that studies language in use, Discourse analysis (D.A.) is a discipline that studies the relationship between language and context of use. As described by McCarty (1991, p. 5), Discourse analysis is a field of study that developed from work in the 1960s and 1970s in different disciplines, including linguistics, semiotics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. The term Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) emerged a little later, and the articles included in the book *Culture, Media, Language* edited by Hall et al. (1980) have many studies on the topic of Critical Discourse Analysis. In the 1990s, CDA as a specific method of linguistic analysis reached a consensus in the academic community, represented mainly by Teun Van Dijk, Gunther Kress, Norman Fairclough, and Ruth Wodak. Van Dijk (2015, p. 466) defined CDA as a mode of discourse analysis research that is primarily used to study how issues such as social rights abuses and inequalities emerge, regenerate and resist in social and political contexts by way of texts and discourses. In other words, Critical Discourse Analysis begins with the aim of understanding, exposing, and ultimately resisting social inequalities, and seeks to uncover issues such as social power relations and ideological tendencies revealed by language. Van Dijk stated that Critical Discourse Analysis is an interdisciplinary subject in which texts or dialogues are framed from cognitive, social, historical, cultural, or political contexts (ibid., 2015, p. 468).

Corpus linguistic analysis produces data and evidence that are empirical, quantitative, and probabilistic in nature claims, and it reveals trends and probabilities in language through electronically generated quantitative data that are the result of generalizations of data extracted from texts or corpora by electronic means, while qualitative statements are the result of interpretations of these data. And this is in line with Lakatos' view that empirical (or scientific) and theoretical progress are inseparable (Lakatos, 1970, p. 123). The application of corpus to critical research allows researchers to identify natural language patterns more objectively and clearly (Baker & McEnery, 2005, p. 197), and Hunston (2002, p. 123) suggests that corpus tools can be used to examine linguistic repetition in texts and that these linguistic phenomena can help researchers to identify implicit information so that the discourse can be understood and described more clearly. Xin (2005, p. 9) pointed out that Critical Discourse Analysis not only focuses on the study of discourse but also combines language, ideology, and social reality criticism, which can reveal the power and ideology behind the discourse and emphasize the role of discourse and social power relations in its construction. Combining corpus linguistics with Critical Discourse Analysis allows researchers to more easily and accurately identify entry points and thus establish a scientific research paradigm (Baker et al., 2008, p. 295). This study combines corpus linguistics and Critical Discourse Analysis to analyze how *TIME* portrays China's image and implied ideology through the cover characters and the content of the stories.

3. Study Design

3.1 Research Data and Questions

The corpus used in this study consists of 72 covers of *TIME* from 1923 to 2022, and nearly 80 Chinese involved in the covers. In this paper, we divide *TIME*'s China-related covers over the past century into four phases based on the historical characteristics of different periods: 1923–1949 (China at war); 1950–1976 (Redified China); 1977–1997 (China in change), and 1998–2022 (diversified development phase of China). This study attempts to address the following questions: 1) What is *TIME*'s tendency in selecting China-related figures, 2) What themes are highlighted in the content and covers of related China-related news reports, and 3) What ideologies are reflected in the image of China by the China-related cover figures and the content of the reports?

3.2 Research Tools and Research Methods

Most corpus processing and retrieval software can only recognize text documents, so all data needs to be saved as text documents and then the texts were cleaned and processed. The lexical tagging tool used in this study is the Online CLAWS Web Tagger System, and the statistical tool is AntConc 4.2.0. Leech and Short (1981) have created a list of categories for language and genre studies, including lexical categories, grammatical categories, metaphorical coherence (rhetoric), and context. Based on this, we analyze and discuss the materials from the levels of cover characters and headlines, high-frequency nouns, word clusters and collocations of keywords, etc.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Cover Character and Headline

As one of the important signs to distinguish the journal from other journals, the cover and headline of the journal is important to highlight the characteristics of the journal and stimulate readers' desire to read. The common feature of the 72 China-related covers and reports in this study is that they are titled with China's latest era background or theme. We analyzed the China-related covers and headlines according to the four time periods we've divided in 3.1.

4.1.1 China at War (1924–1949)

During the rule of the Kuomintang government, China could be said in a time of warlords and constant warfare, coupled with the time of Japan's aggression against China war and World War II, making China's domestic wars take on the significance of the world's anti-fascist war. There were 18 *TIME* cover stories involving China in this time, among which Chiang Kai-shek and his wife were on the cover of *TIME* twice, became China's leading couple with the highest number of *TIME* covers. Chiang Kai-shek was on the cover of *TIME* nine times, and other figures on the cover of *TIME* mainly included warlords who were more powerful in China at that time, such as General Wu Peifu, who was the first to be on the cover of *TIME* in 1924, and later "Christian General" Feng Yuxiang and "King of Shanxi" Yan Xishan, followed by the main officials of the Kuomintang Government, such as Wang Jingwei, Chen Cheng, Song Ziwen, Chen Lifu, etc. These people shaped the political direction of China at that time, and Pu Yi was also on the cover twice because he became the emperor of Manchukuo. On February 7, 1949, Mao Zedong was on the cover of *TIME* for the first time, and he was looking very vigorous in this period, with the words "Democracy and Unification" in red behind him.

Generally speaking, words are the voice of the mind, and the speaker's tone and discourse tendency can be seen through language expressions, which can be divided into three categories: affirmative, neutral, and negative. In terms of news headlines, expressions that do not reveal the speaker's speech tendency can be regarded as a neutral tone, while language that contains obvious positive or derogatory words can be regarded as a positive or negative tone tendency. By counting the 18 China-related covers and character descriptions, we can get a glimpse of the general tone tendency of *TIME*'s coverage of wartime China during this period (Figure 1).

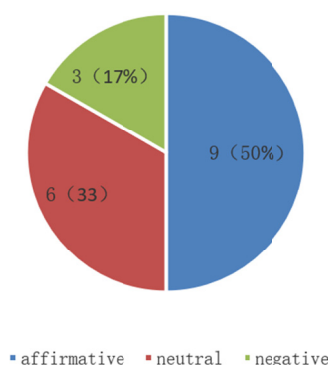


Figure 1. Tendency of tone on the cover of *TIME* (1924–1949)

Figure 1 shows that half (50%) of the 18 *TIME* cover headlines on China were positive expressions, such as "Biggest man in China" in the description of Wu Peifu, "Rose out of the Sun-set" for Chiang Kai-shek, and "Chinese Christian Soldier to change the rules of the army rabble" for Feng Yuxiang, and other words with positive connotations were used to describe the characters. Negative connotations were used in only three cases (16%). Of the three headlines, the one with Song Mei-ling (Madame Chiang) as the cover character on March 1, 1943, has the least negative connotation "She and China know what endurance means," which suggests a slightly more pessimistic connotation. At this time, China's war against Japan was at its most difficult point, and Song Mei-ling was lobbying the United States to gain greater support for the Kuomintang government. However, during such a tense situation, all China could do is to be patient. On February 7, 1949, Mao Zedong made his debut on the cover of *TIME*, and he was described as "The Communist Boss learned tyranny as a boy". The term "Tyranny" is full of negative connotations, and it is the first time that *TIME* had used this term to describe the person on the cover that is involved in China since it was published, which proves *TIME*'s attitude toward the Chinese government represented by Mao Zedong.

4.1.2 Redified China (1950–1976)

On October 1, 1949, the founding of the People's Republic of China ended the rule of the Kuomintang government led by Chiang Kai-shek in mainland China, and the Kuomintang government retreated to Taiwan, opening up an era of cross-strait partition in China. As the world's most authoritative current affairs magazine, *TIME*'s China-related covers and coverage content also changed significantly. In this period, *TIME* has 24 China-related covers and reports. Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai have been on the cover of *TIME* the most times, 11 and 8 times respectively, including Mao's first cover on *TIME* in 1949, making him the most Chinese who has been on the cover of *TIME* (12 times). In addition to these two, there are other top leaders of the Communist Party of China (such as Liu Shaoqi, Lin Biao, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yi, etc.), two issues with Kuomintang figures Wu Guozhen and Chiang Kai-shek on the cover (which was also the last time Chiang Kai-shek was on the cover of *TIME*), one religious figure (Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso), and two more special issues. The cover of the other two issues is unique: one is about the ping-pong diplomacy between U.S. and China, with American ping-pong players touring the Great Wall, and the other issue has no people on it but is about the skyscrapers of Hong Kong, intended to contrast with mainland China's predicament. We counted these 24 China-related covers and character descriptions to explore the general tone tendency of *TIME*'s coverage of redified China during this period (Figure 2).

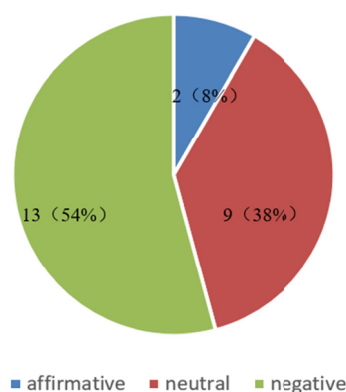


Figure 2. Tendency of tone on the cover of *TIME* (1950–1976)

In Figure 2, we can find that more than half (54%) of the 24 China-related cover headlines used negative connotations, while positive connotations were the lowest, only two (8%). Among the two positive connotations, one was used in the ping-pong diplomacy between the U.S. and China, and the other used “Nixon’s China Odyssey” in a report on President Richard Nixon’s visit to China. The word “Odyssey” comes from Latin, telling the story of Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, after the fall of Troy to find his home after ten years of wandering, later it is often used in its metaphorical sense to describe the long, adventurous journey. Seven of the 24 reports used the word “red” to describe China, a word that has a positive connotation in China, but a derogatory one in the English-speaking world, signifying brutality, and bloodshed, and conjuring up images of violence and danger. The *TIME* used “Red” for literal fidelity, but it inadvertently revealed a verbal attitude that was resistant to Communist China. The portraits on the covers accompanying these stories also presented a satirical and exaggerated attitude, such as the use of “evil dragons” combined with characters or “locusts” combined with characters to develop a negative image of Communist China. In addition to “Red”, “Arrogant Outcast”, “Enemy”, “Nightmare”, and “Chaos” were used to describe China, the negative attitudes embedded in them are evident. In addition, it is worth noting that on August 7, 1950, the cover figure of *TIME* is Wu Guozhen, who was a Kuomintang government official, on the cover of this issue, an evil dragon was about to devour Taiwan, and it is interesting to note that *TIME* did not use the word “Taiwan” to describe the island, but instead used the word “Formosas”, a word derived from Portuguese, meaning “beautiful”, was deliberately used by *TIME* to refer to Taiwan. *TIME* deliberately used the term to refer to Taiwan to separate Taiwan from China, and many Taiwanese now commonly use the term “Formosa” to refer to Taiwan to separate it from China.

4.1.3 China in Change (1977–1997)

Starting in 1977, Communist China underwent a new era, emerging from the gloom of the ten-year civil unrest of the Cultural Revolution and beginning a new chapter of China’s development, especially the comeback of

Deng Xiaoping, who had an extremely far-reaching significance on the development of Chinese society. During this period, *TIME* had 17 China-related covers and reports, among which Deng Xiaoping appeared the most times, 7 times. Together with the cover of the January 19, 1976 issue, Deng Xiaoping appeared on the cover of *TIME* 8 times in total, and it is worth noting that in 1978, Deng Xiaoping was named *TIME*'s Man of the Year. The normalization of relations between China and U.S. was far-reaching for world relations at that time, and Deng Xiaoping, who contributed to this change in relations, was also highly praised by *TIME*, and the cover of *TIME* changed from the red color that used to record the leading figures of China, and used the blue color that symbolized peace.

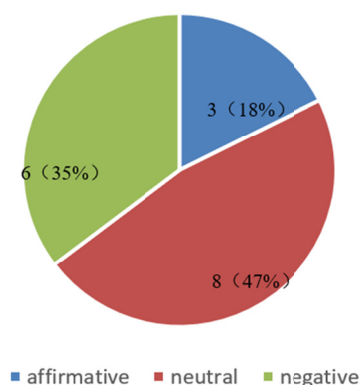


Figure 3. Tendency of tone on the cover of *TIME* (1977–1997)

With the help of Figure 3, we find that the number of positive terms on *TIME*'s China covers and stories increased slightly during this period (3), with the largest number of neutral terms (47%) and a decrease in the proportion of negative terms (35%). From these data, we can find that the image of China in *TIME*'s China-related covers and stories is different from the previous Redified China period, partly because Deng Xiaoping became the de facto controller of China during this period, seeking to reform and change relations with the U.S. In the issue of September 23, 1985, Deng Xiaoping was once again on the cover, with the theme that China is moving away from Marx, and the background of the cover shows two contrasting China, one a troubled China under Mao and the other a prosperous China with tall buildings under Deng. During this period, Deng Xiaoping became *TIME*'s Man of the Year twice, which is enough to reflect *TIME*'s attitude and tendency toward China under Deng. In addition, from the issue of September 26, 1983, *TIME* no longer uses Wade-Giles romanization, which has been used by *TIME* for 60 years, in the headline of the cover of the China-related figures, but used the pinyin system that has been used in mainland China since 1958, this also showed the attitude of the *TIME* toward Deng-era China. However, it is important to note that most of the negative terms used in this period come from the five China-related reports of *TIME* in 1989, when the “school wave” (the protest by students of a lot Chinese universities) broke out in China, i.e., the “Tiananmen Square Massacre” 1989, which led to the emergence of the words “Turmoil”, “Massacre”, “Mad”, etc. were used.

4.1.4 Diversified Development Phase of China (1998–2022)

In February 1997, Deng Xiaoping, the second generation of Chinese leaders, departed, and China entered the era of Jiang Zemin. The issue on March 3, 1997 featured Deng Xiaoping with the theme “Will Deng’s heirs turn Beijing into a superpower the world can love?”, reflecting the Western world’s uncertainty about China after the Deng era. The China-related covers and stories in *TIME* during this period were less intense than those in the previous three issues, with only 13 China-related covers and stories in 25 years (Figure 4).

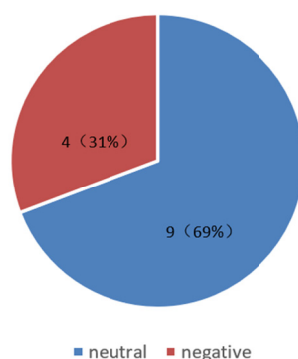


Figure 4. Tendency of tone on the cover of *TIME* (1998–2022)

Figure 4 shows that in the past 25 years, the tone of *TIME*'s cover report on China has become more neutral and objective. The reason for this is that with the end of the East-West Cold War in the 1990s, the world economy has entered a track of rapid development, cooperation among countries has become increasingly close, multi-polarity has gradually taken shape, and the world has formed a situation of one superpower and multi-great powers co-existence, so *TIME* has paid less attention to Chinese politics and society. One of the more obvious features is that it is no longer centered on those who in control of the Chinese regime, but has shifted to a different perspective, focusing on China's social development, economy, people's livelihoods, and changes in social life, so that the use of language and tone is not as aggressive as in the past, and instead describes China's development more objectively. It is worth noting, however, that several of the negative terms that appear in this period were because the relationship between China and the U.S. seems to be shifting from win-win cooperation in the past to a confrontational one in recent years, which has led to the emergence of terms such as "Red Alert" and "Corruption of Power" to describe Chinese society.

4.2 High-Frequency Terms

Halliday (1985, p. 11) has pointed out that the written language tends to use normalized vocabulary, often treating experiences and phenomena as entities, and therefore using nouns more often. Feng (2012, p. 5) has also stated that high-frequency words refer to "words that are used particularly frequently in a text" and are also "the main part of the text" (ibid., p. 452). In terms of *TIME*'s China-related cover characters and texts, examining the high-frequency terms in the texts of different periods can reveal the focus and tendency of *TIME*'s attention in different historical periods, as well as the image of the China in each period. Using AntConc 4.2.0, we searched the cover stories of *TIME* on China in the four periods, and the top high-frequency terms were listed as follows (Table 1).

Table 1. High-frequency terms of China-related cover reports in *TIME* 100 years (top 20)

Serial number	1924–1949		1950–1976		1977–1997		1998–2022	
	Vocabulary	Frequency	Vocabulary	Frequency	Vocabulary	Frequency	Vocabulary	Frequency
1	China	380	China	766	China	626	China	441
2	Chiang	264	Mao	475	Chinese	396	Chinese	196
3	Japanese	238	Chinese	430	Deng	265	Party	135
4	Japan	149	Peking	322	people	277	Beijing	91
5	general	101	Chou	243	party	193	world	90
6	war	96	communist	193	Mao	179	people	84
7	generalissimo	91	people	181	Peking	149	Xi	81
8	nanking	84	party	168	government	138	communist	67
9	Chen	77	power	118	Beijing	128	government	63
10	communists	65	revolution	112	Teng	116	power	58
11	Sun	60	army	109	Soviet	111	country	55
12	army	59	communists	102	world	110	Mao	52
13	people	59	Chiang	98	revolution	102	Bo	49
14	shanghai	57	soviet	96	country	101	Guards	46
15	military	55	war	95	communist	96	Chen	37
16	troops	45	Russia	73	power	95	economy	31
17	communist	43	military	71	military	89	society	31
18	Manchuria	41	Moscow	68	army	75	revolution	29
19	Soviet	39	Tung	63	Cater	73	system	28
20	premier	35	American	55	Tiananmen	71	Sars	27

Table 1 shows that “China” ranked first in all four periods of *TIME*, which is consistent with the theme of this study. From 1924–1949, “Chiang” ranked second among the top 20 High-frequency terms of China-related cover reports. “Chiang” is the surname of “蒋介石”(Chiang Kai-shek), indicating that Chiang Kai-shek occupied the center of *TIME*’s China-related covers and reports during this period. “Japanese” and “Japan” ranked third and fourth, indicating that the China-related covers and reports of *TIME* magazine in this period were mostly related to Japan, indicating that *TIME* magazine paid more attention to China’s real-time politics and was more concerned with the war between China and Japan. The word “war” ranked sixth, which indicates that the reports in this period highlight more war events in China. The words “army” and “military” in the top 20 high-frequency nouns illustrate this point. Other high-frequency terms such as “Nanking” and “Shanghai” indicate that *TIME* gave more attention to these important Chinese cities.

Between 1950 and 1976, as the regime changed in China, *TIME* focused more on the government of the People’s Republic of China, so “Mao” (Mao Zedong, the controller of the Chinese regime) became the most photographed high-frequency term during this period, and “Chou” (Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai), as the main assistant of “Mao”, was the other high-frequency term besides “Mao” in *TIME*. Because Beijing has become the capital of China, *TIME* used “Peking” more often to refer to the Chinese government, and “Peking” had replaced “Nanking” as the 4th most frequent term. “Communist” has also risen from the 17th of the first period to the 6th position, which is in line with the current social and political situation in China. As the government of the People’s Republic of China is people-oriented, the word “people” was also ranked more highly. In addition, the ranking of “army” and “war” had decreased, indicating that war is no longer a theme in China during this period, but it still ranks in the top 15, which is mainly related to the wars between China and Chiang Kai-shek’s government in Taiwan, the United States, India, etc. China’s relationship with the Soviet Union deteriorated during the honeymoon period, so the words “Russia”, “Soviet”, and “Moscow” appear more frequently than before.

From 1977 and 1997, Deng Xiaoping became the de facto ruler of China, so “Deng” was ranked third (Teng is the translation of “邓” in Wade-Giles romanization and was ranked 10th). As Chinese politics during this period were still influenced to a certain extent by Mao Zedong era, “Mao” appears frequently, ranking sixth. However, the words “military” and “army” still appeared among the top 20 high-frequency nouns in this period, mainly related to the war between China and Vietnam. The main reason for the 20th ranking of “Tiananmen” is the outbreak of the “students protest activity” (or Xuechao) in China in 1989, which was reported by *TIME* in four articles during this period and therefore had a higher frequency, indicating that *TIME* still pays more attention to the socio-political events in China.

From 1998 to 2022, the words “people” and “world” ranked significantly higher, indicating that *TIME*’s focus on

China shifted from political events to the development of China, its people, and its relationship with the world. However, some attention was still given to Chinese political figures, such as Xi Jinping (Xi), China's fifth-generation leader, and Bo Xilai (Bo), another Chinese political figure. Notably, "Mao" was once again among *TIME*'s top-ranked terms, mainly because *TIME* compared the rule of "Xi" over China to that of "Mao", arguing that there are numerous similarities between the two.

It is easy to see that *TIME*'s focus on China varies from period to period, but mainly focuses on political events, which is also consistent with the purpose of *TIME*'s publication. Through the statistics and analysis of *TIME*'s high-frequency terms, we can find the current situation of Chinese society in different periods, and these findings are basically consistent with the analysis of *TIME*'s China-related cover headlines in the previous section.

4.3 Word Clusters and Collocations of Keywords

It is one of the basic assumptions of modern linguistics that the lexical patterns of a text are primarily used to convey meaning, and Sinclair et al. (1970, p. 77) have stated that the lexical organization function of language can be discovered by studying the important collocational patterns, and these lexical patterns are the organizational forms in the language that determines the content and structure of the text. Therefore, the identification of lexical patterns in texts helps to decode their meaning, but the identification of these patterns often depends on automatic, i.e., computerized, analysis and cannot be achieved by intuitive means, as is the case with quantitative forms of keywords. Baker (2004) emphasizes this point by arguing that keywords lead the researcher to important concepts in the text. Mason and Platt (2006) stated that keywords are collocations in a text or corpus that point to themes present in the data and reveal connections between them. Williams (1983) defined keywords to examine variants of the term politically correct in a corpus of newspaper articles, particularly politically correct and politically incorrect. The investigation of keywords provides insight into thematic and structural features in texts and can (1) identify important topics in texts and (2) reveal the speaker's ideology. We retrieved the contents of the China-related cover stories of *TIME* in different periods with the help of corpus statistical software AntConc 4.2.0 and could get the keywords of the discourse in different periods. With the help of word clusters and the contextual co-occurrence function of AntConc 4.2.0, we retrieved the modifiers associated with them, and from these modifying words, we could get a glimpse of the tendency towards attitudes in the China-related cover stories of *TIME* in different periods (Table 2).

Table 2. Keywords collocations tone tendency

Time	Vocabulary	Positive connotation	Neutral connotation	Negative connotation
1924–1949	China	modernize.	reunification; reunifying; Northern; South; ruled; remade; handle	besets; oppressed; conquering; subjugate; conquer; unpredictable; insult; cursed; beat; crush; hit; invaded; overrunning
	Chiang	Lord Chiang (2); great Chiang (1). Madame (18); Generalissimo (30)	President (8); General (16); Premier Chiang (4); young Chiang (1).	Dictator (6); sinner (1)
1950–1976	China	Improved; ordered; modern; strong; independent; vast; rise.	contemporary; Communists; transforming; guerrilla.	catastrophic; Red; Mao's; hysteria; aggressively; vulnerable; rigid; paper tiger; dangerous; ravenous; bogeyman.
	Mao	prestige; visionary, architect	Boss; Chairman; senile.	lumbering; impugning; anarchy; hysteria; opposing; romantic; triumphant; overthrow; anti-; undermine; willful; conqueror; boastful; foul liar. arrogant; abortive.
1977–1997	China	huge; modernized; cautiously; victorious; free; growing; prospective.		struggle; heavy price; least developed; ambitious; weak; unreliable; chaos; rigid; dangerous; backward; poor; least developed; puritan; ravaged. overstuffed.
	Deng	Eminent; determination; pragmatist; remarkable; bold; steel-hand; innovations; great		impatient, different; diminutive; conservatism
1998–2022	China	encouraging, success, assertiveness, ascendancy.		hurting, aggressive, muzzled, threatened.
	Xi	herald, confident.	President, leader.	notoriously, crackdown, hostile, scion, emperor, uncomfortable, anoint, ruler.

With the help of Table 2, we find that the tone of *TIME*'s China-related cover stories in the four periods was not consistent with the China-related cover Headlines. First, during the wartime China period, the two keywords in *TIME*'s China-related cover stories were "China" and "Chiang", and Table 2 shows that most of the China-related stories in *TIME* during this period were dominated by negative connotations, followed by neutral words, and very few positive words. The words "invaded," "oppressed," "conquering," and "unpredictable" are highly visible, presenting readers with an image of China as a war-torn, enslaved, and oppressed country. Being a member of the Allied camp, the description of China in this way seems to be more sympathetic to American readers. It is interesting to note that the words that go with "Chiang" are mainly positive and neutral in connotation, with only two negative words, "Lord," "great," "Madame" and "Generalissimo" showing respect for *TIME* for "Chiang Kai-shek" and his wife, and highlight the positive image of "Chiang Kai-shek" as the supreme ruler of Chinese society.

During the second period (1950-1976), although the China-related covers and reports in *TIME* still mainly used negative terms, the use of positive connotation terms increased. In this period, the People's Republic of China was founded and became an important member of the communist state, and *TIME* accordingly used words such as "improved," "strong," "independent," and "rise" to modify China, showing *TIME*'s objective and impartial side. In contrast, the other keyword of the period, "Mao," shows the opposite trend, as "Mao" refers to "Mao Zedong," the supreme ruler of China during this period. The modifying words associated with "Mao" that appeared in *TIME* were largely negative, such as "foul liar," "arrogant", "hysteria", "triumphant" and other words. Even *TIME* described "Mao" as "a new emperor" of China, "a thief who stole the revolution fruit", "a romantic but unrealistic ideologue", and so on. Van Dijk (2015) has proposed the cognitive strategy of positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation, which is reflected in *TIME*'s China-related covers and news reports. It is worth noting, however, that the image of "Mao" constructed by *TIME* changed with the beginning of Sino-American contacts in 1971, as the September 20, 1976 issue of *TIME* referred to "Mao" as an "architect", and "the most readable of Marxist theoreticians", etc.

From 1977 to 1997, *TIME* still used more negative terms than positive terms in its coverage of "China". However, the number of positive terms used in the coverage of "Deng Xiaoping" was higher than the number of negative terms. This suggests that *TIME*'s overall attitude toward China is still negative, although this deep-rooted attitude has changed slightly as China's power in the international community has grown. Deng Xiaoping, the great architect of China's reform and opening-up policy, has made undeniable contributions to China's prosperity, and, coupled with the fact that he facilitated the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and United States and was more pro-American, *TIME* was mostly positive about Deng Xiaoping as a "pragmatist". And pragmatism is one of the values advocated by Westerners, especially Americans. Deng Xiaoping has appeared on the cover of *TIME* eight times and was selected as *TIME*'s Man of the Year in 1978 and 1985 respectively. Moreover, in the process of contextual co-occurrence, we find that *TIME* changed its traditional approach of reporting on Chinese, which focuses on personal anecdotes, and instead focuses on the reform and opening-up policy advocated by Deng Xiaoping and the impact of this policy. However, it is noteworthy that *TIME*'s coverage of Deng Xiaoping acknowledged that China's reform and opening-up policy was an unprecedented event, but such reforms were the result of the fusion of communism and capitalism, and that the success of Deng's reforms was due to the adoption of capitalism in China's economy. It seems to praise China's achievements of reform and opening up, but in reality, it aims to promote the superiority of capitalist ideology.

Between 1998 and 2022, *TIME*'s China cover story used more objective terms to describe China, with few positive and few negative terms. In terms of positive descriptions, *TIME* acknowledged China's great achievements since its reform and opening up, and recognized China's reform success and its status as a great power, while the negative terms were based on this thought-provoking issue, also known as the threat of China, which seek to highlight the threat of China's development on the world. "Xi" became one of the keywords for China-related cover stories during this period, and it was referred to the Chinese President Xi Jinping, and the terms used in the coverage of "Xi" was mainly negative. It not only considered "Xi" as "infamous" but also tried to build up an image of China's "emperor" and "dictator" in the minds of Western readers. With the help of AnctConc 4.2.0's contextual co-occurrence function, we could find that "Xi" often appears together with "Mao", e.g.:

- (1) Chinese President Xi Jinping has already accumulated more authority than any of his predecessors since Mao Zedong.
- (2) Xi Jinping builds a personality cult with echoes of Mao-and some members of the Communist Party aren't happy.

(3) Now the 62-year-old scion of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) royalty stands at the center of a personality cult not seen in the People's Republic since the days when frenzied Red Guards cheered Chairman Mao's launch of the Cultural Revolution. "Xi is directing a building-god campaign, and he is the god."

(4) "Like Mao, Xi thinks if China succumbs to Western values, these forces will destroy not only China's exceptionalism but also the stability of the Chinese Communist Party."

In the previous part, we found that the words that connect with "Mao" are mostly negative terms. *TIME*'s association of "Xi" with "Mao" is indicative of the attitude toward "Xi" revealed in *TIME*'s China-related reports. It is worth noting that, in contrast to the negative terms used to describe "Xi", the modifying term of "Bo" was more positive, such as "charismatic politician" etc. "Bo" refers to "Bo Xilai", who lost the political battle with "Xi".

5. Conclusion

With the help of corpus statistics, the article compares the China-related covers and reports of *TIME* over its 100-year history. The focus of *TIME* on China, China-related cover characters and headlines, and the content of China-related reports vary greatly in terms of language in different historical periods. The image and report on wartime China are more objective and positive, with a more positive tone and less negative information content. In the stage of Redified China, the China-related reports mainly use negative terms, trying to create a chaotic and bloody image of Communist China for Western readers. In the reforming or Changing phase of China, the coverage shifts from mainly negative terms to neutral and objective terms, unfolding China's change and development to the Western world. While in the diversified development phase of China, *TIME*'s China-related cover stories and terms are more objective, showing the image of China under rapid development. As far as the China-related cover characters of *TIME* are concerned, the characters and images that *TIME* tries to highlight are not consistent in different historical periods, before the founding of the People's Republic of China, *TIME*'s China-related cover characters mostly have objective and positive images. After that, except for "Deng Xiaoping" and "Dalai Lama", the other China-related figures on the cover of *TIME* mostly showed negative images. Accordingly, the image of China on the cover of *TIME* is strongly influenced by the ideology, journalistic values, culture, and worldview differences of the reporters.

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Authors contributions

Bing Zhang and Zhenzhu Shu were responsible for study design and revising. Zhenzhu Shu was responsible for data collection. Bing Zhang drafted the manuscript and Zhenzhu Shu revised it. All authors read and approved the final manuscript, and the authors contributed equally to the study.

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